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UNITED STATES-PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA  
MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS:  
PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS

by

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MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS:  
PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS

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## ABSTRACT

American military relations with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been in a constant state of flux since their rocky beginnings during the Second World War. Since the Tiananmen Square incident of June 1989, efforts to reestablish a positive working relationship between the U.S. Department of Defense and the PLA have been restrained by domestic political pressures within both polities and a number of crises which increased political tensions between both nations' governments. Due to reactive policies implemented by both governments, engagement programs between the United States and PRC have yielded few tangible benefits to either side in the past fifteen years.

This thesis addresses the history of U.S. military engagement with the PRC and discusses past American policies of "containment" and "engagement" of China. Case studies concerning American engagement with Taiwan and Thailand reveal the benefits of close links with partners in Asia and provide programs for possible emulation in the U.S.-PRC relationship. Through managed engagement programs such as systematic security summits, educational exchanges and partnership operations initiatives, a stable defense dialogue between American and Chinese militaries can yield significant results in reducing tensions between their two governments and averting future crises through improved communication and cooperation.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the early days after the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rise to power over mainland China in 1949, the United States implemented policies rejecting the new government outright, restraining its ability to engage in diplomacy, and controlling its access to resources for economic development. This Cold War mentality and the accompanying dual xenophobia in some segments of these dichotomous cultures and opposing ideologies were briefly set aside during the early 1970s and 1980s in order to serve pragmatic concerns of balancing against the threat posed by the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> While this period of limited American engagement with the People's Republic of China (PRC) served the strategic goals of drawing the CCP toward U.S. political interests and dividing Communist bloc efforts to struggle against Western capitalism, foundations for future cooperation between the U.S. and Chinese sides were not sufficiently developed to ensure peaceful co-existence for the long term. Diplomatic deliberations throughout the early 1970s made significant progress toward establishing the PRC as a government more broadly recognized by the Western world.<sup>2</sup> Avenues for political discourse and cooperation between the United States and PRC were cultivated through the exchange of ambassadors, various high-level summits and the installation of PRC representatives into the United Nations. Economic relationships have flourished in the past two decades as the PRC economy has reformed to allow market forces to influence commercial activity and trade controls have loosened to permit an open exchange of goods and services.<sup>3</sup> These channels for cooperation and peaceful resolution of differences have yielded great returns in recent years and should be continued and expanded at each opportunity.

However, throughout this period of remarkable economic reform within the PRC and political engagement between the CCP and the U.S. government, a third pillar of

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick Macfarquhar, The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 264.

<sup>2</sup> While some major western powers, such as the United Kingdom, established diplomatic relations with the PRC soon after its formation, formal recognition of the PRC by numerous nations aligned with American foreign policy objectives began in earnest during the early 1970s with the removal of U.S. objections and political pressure.

<sup>3</sup> An example of PRC economic reform can be seen in efforts to transition the bulk of the nation's productive capacity to the private sector from inefficient State Owned Enterprises. Seth Faison, "In Major Shift, China Will Sell State Industries." *The New York Times*, 12 September 1997.

positive official relations has not been pursued consistently. Opportunities to build rapport between both countries' national leadership and government institutions have been sometimes sacrificed in the interest of rewarding or punishing China for its cooperation, or lack thereof, on issues. Specifically, the lack of positive, systemic, long-term military-to-military relations between the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has perpetuated a sense of estrangement between the two governments and their attendant military leaders. Since the early days of post-Mao cooperation between the PRC and United States, military collaboration has been in a constant state of flux due to the inability of each government to look beyond short-term political disagreements to the broader goal of pan-Pacific security cooperation.

Over the course of the past quarter century, this pattern of episodic vacillation has limited both nations' abilities to clearly understand each other's strategic intentions, doctrinal influences or decision-making processes. By understanding the historical, cultural and contemporary foundations for various conflicts of interest between the United States and China, policy-makers and military leaders on both sides of the Pacific can more adroitly negotiate, effectively collaborate and avoid antagonizing each other over issues of short-term concern. The practice of halting security cooperation as a sign of protest against perceived injustice has an immeasurable impact on each nation's long-term strategic interests in exchange for achieving limited foreign policy objectives or satisfying a finite domestic political agenda item. In addition to reducing military exchanges in response to general disagreement over many of each others' strategic goals and methods, there have been several specific crises over the past fifteen years that epitomize these ad hoc stop-and-start engagement practices. Included among these incidents are the U.S. response to CCP actions against pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the PRC reaction to U.S. forces inadvertently bombing the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1999.<sup>4</sup>

By avoiding short-term thinking in mutual engagement efforts that benefit each nation's long-term strategic interests, the United States and the People's Republic of

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<sup>4</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser "Beginning to Thaw," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Pacific Forum - Comparative Connections* (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1999). [e-journal] available from: [http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/993Qus\\_china.html](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/993Qus_china.html); Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

China can both achieve higher states of security, stability and prosperity for their respective citizenry. As the United States military develops stable, systemic relations with the PLA, tensions between the military leadership of both sides will begin to moderate.<sup>5</sup> A new crop of general officers will come to power in each nation's military with a more complete understanding of how their mutual interests can best be served through cooperation, not antagonism. Furthermore, as each side deepens its cooperative exchanges to include lower ranking officers, their respective governments lay a solid foundation for mutual security and regional stability that will perpetuate itself for generations to come.

This thesis will develop recommendations for improving U.S.-PRC military-to-military relations by assessing the nature and importance of American interests in East Asia, discussing several of the most salient trends in the region's security environment and formulating its basic argument within the framework of the bipolar debate that persists in today's policymaking circles. This debate over whether American foreign policy should seek to 'contain' China's rise in economic, political and military power or 'engage' the PRC as an important and viable partner is discussed at length in order to establish a historical foundation for contemporary policy prescriptions. In order to build a solid program of American military engagement with the PLA for the future, this thesis draws on case studies of positive, long-term, cooperative security relationships with two key Asian partners. A thorough review of U.S. military relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan and the Kingdom of Thailand over the past sixty years reveals the high-level benefits of extensive contact between the armed forces of both polities, as well as specific engagement programs that warrant emulation in the context of U.S.-PRC relations.

#### A. U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN EAST ASIA

##### 1. Regional Stability

A basic premise of contemporary U.S. foreign policy is that encouraging governments to transition from autocracy to free and democratic societies breeds

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Montaperto, "Engaging China's Military: Blueprint for a New Military Relationship with China," *Rough Waters: Navigating the US-China Security Agenda* (June 1998) [On-line]; available from <http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/asia/china/06221998montaperto.html>; Internet; accessed 17 Jan 2005.



prosperity and peaceful coexistence between nations.<sup>6</sup> Over the course of the past three decades, cultural and informational exchanges, as well as commercial trade between U.S. and PRC markets, have supported this fundamental goal and improved state-to-state relations between their two governments. As the PRC continues its economic reform process toward greater transparency and reduced emphasis on central planning, Chinese citizens are experiencing increases in their standard of living and have higher expectations for equitable treatment from their government.<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon will continue as a ‘virtuous cycle’ of increases in productivity, savings, investment, fiscal solvency and quality of life for the foreseeable future as long as the rule of law is maintained and the petitions of citizens are earnestly reviewed and fulfilled.<sup>8</sup> Present trends indicate that this process of economic growth will continue to encourage China’s political liberalization process,<sup>9</sup> albeit at an extremely slow pace when measured against U.S. expectations, thereby evolving into a system closely approximating Western values of freedom, democracy and justice within the PRC polity. As this internal stability generates greater political participation by rank-and-file citizens, inherent checks and balances of a Western-style democratic system will moderate central government foreign policies, reduce antagonistic rhetoric and discourage employment of military force to achieve national objectives. On-going efforts to increase political participation through village-level democratic election reforms, central party campaigns against political

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. President. State of the Union Address. 1994. *Clinton Presidential Center*. 25 January 1994. [On-line]; available from <http://www.clintonpresidentialcenter.org/legacy/012594-speech-by-president-sotu-address.htm>; Internet; accessed 18 Jan 2005 and U.S. President. Inaugural Address. 2005. Office of the Press Secretary. 20 January 2005. [On-line]; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce J. Dickson “Democratic Development in Taiwan: A Model for the PRC?,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies Pacific Forum - PacNet Newsletter* (27 October 2000). [e-journal] available from: <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0043.html>; Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

<sup>8</sup> “Economist Calls for Lifting Rein on Non-State Sectors and Tapping Rural Market,” *People’s Daily* (Beijing), 22 July 2002; [On-line] available from: [http://english.people.com.cn/200207/19/eng20020719\\_99990.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200207/19/eng20020719_99990.shtml); Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

<sup>9</sup> H. Lyman Miller, “The Hu-Wen Leadership at Six Months,” *China Leadership Monitor* (Fall 2003), 1. [e-journal] available from: <http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20034/lm.pdf>; Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

corruption and greater transparency in government affairs all point to a strengthening of civic awareness among the general populace of the PRC.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, by engaging the common citizen in the fundamental political processes of the PRC, one of the most pressing sources of interregional tension between the United States and China can be eliminated. Evidence of greater civil participation in government, transparency in CCP decision-making processes and responsible behavior in regional political-military affairs undermines many of the U.S. domestic arguments for confrontation with China. Furthermore, trans-Pacific commercial interdependence not only creates a situation wherein both states may influence each other's decision making processes, but also constitutes a vested interest in their former adversary's economic well-being in order to ensure their own continued prosperity. This phenomenon will also reduce intra-regional tensions as the varied interests of East Asia's politically diverse nations become linked to one another through commerce and a common understanding that collective well-being enhances the stability, status and prestige of the individual states. Foremost among the beneficiaries of this East Asian regional interdependence policy are the PRC and the government of the Republic of China on Taiwan.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Reduction of Cross-Strait Tensions

While the provocative conduct of the government of North Korea with regard to its alleged nuclear weapons capability holds significant potential to destabilize East Asia,<sup>12</sup> the greater threat by far to continued peace in the region is the onset of military hostilities between Taiwan and mainland China. Due to the long history of cooperation between the Republic of China and the United States, any conflict between the PLA and Taiwan military will most certainly involve a U.S. response to either maintain the status quo or repel an invasion. A clash between China and the United States would seriously affect the global economy through a disruption of Pacific trade, a shift of priorities from

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<sup>10</sup> Gunter Schubert, "Stability Through More Participation? - Local Direct Elections and Their Impact On Communist Rule In Present-Day China," *ASIEN* (July 2002), 49. [On-line] available from: <http://www.asienkunde.de/articles/schubert84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Scott L. Kastner, "Ambiguity, Economic Interdependence, and the U.S. Strategic Dilemma in the Taiwan Strait," Unpublished Paper (2004), 20. [On-line] available from: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/kastner/Kastnerambiguity.pdf>; Internet; accessed 28 Jan 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Soo-hyuck, "Measures and Prospects on the Resolution of the DPRK Nuclear Issue," Third International Institute for Strategic Studies Shangri-la Dialogue, Singapore, 4-6 June 2004. [On-line] available from: <http://www.iiss.org/showdocument.php?docID=382>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.



commercial to military production and a rapid increase in global oil prices. Additionally, an escalation of this notional conflict to include PLA attacks on U.S. installations throughout the western Pacific could embroil Japan<sup>13</sup> and South Korea into the struggle and even result in an exchange of nuclear weapons. The present U.S. policy of “strategic ambiguity,” neither confirming, nor denying, our intention to defend Taiwan against an assault by the mainland, limits both sides’ predisposition to decide the issue of the island polity’s political status unilaterally. However, the growing cultural, informational and, especially, commercial exchanges regularly occurring between Taiwan and the mainland hold even greater promise for continued peace in the region than the threat of U.S. military intervention.

While the threat of active intervention by the United States to physically defend the Republic of China (ROC) from military attack has long held the conflict between Taiwan and the PRC in abeyance, this confrontational posture has not succeeded in fostering positive relations between the two polities. Past U.S. efforts increasing ROC capabilities to defend itself through arms sales and White House statements of unambiguous support for that island’s right to political self-determination have generated significant angst and ire among the leadership of the CCP. From the PRC perspective of the Taiwan question being an internal issue, the tiresome U.S. policy of meddling in Chinese domestic affairs continues to require a significantly hard-line stance to defend its national sovereignty and domestic socio-political stability. Prudent reaction to a ROC military build-up requires a concurrent increase in PLA capabilities across the Taiwan Strait in the form of the relatively inexpensive and reasonably effective surface-to-surface missile force deployed throughout mainland China’s southern coastal provinces. Conversely, ceaseless efforts on the part of state-sponsored, non-governmental organizations promoting cross-strait tourism, correspondence, direct shipping and commercial airline flights continue to make progress in developing grassroots linkages and interdependent economies. Billions of dollars of direct investment and an even greater value of goods and services traverse the Taiwan Strait each year. Just as strong business interests within the PRC have encouraged greater political liberalization (as

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<sup>13</sup> Kosuke Takahashi, “China ‘Threat’ Strengthens US-Japan Military Ties,” *Asia Times*, 13 January 2005; [On-line] available from: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/GA13Dh01.html>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.



evident in recent constitutional amendments ensuring private property rights<sup>14</sup>), the strong relationships developed during the course of business transactions between PRC and ROC entrepreneurs, financiers and consumers will encourage a peaceful conclusion of the reunification question.

Further reduction of the hard-line position of PLA leadership with regard to Taiwan reunification, increased professionalization reforms within the PLA personnel system, and a continuation of policies designed to reduce PLA involvement in politics will all encourage a peaceful resolution to cross-Strait tensions. Efforts to liberalize PLA civil-military relations and reduce its influence outside of the realm of national defense will likely achieve positive results similar to those programs undertaken by various East and Southeast Asian nation-states over the past decade. Democratizing reforms, bolstered by increased civilian control over national military forces and divestiture of non-defense functions from the armed forces, have made significant progress toward social stability, economic prosperity and regional solidarity throughout Asia. A critical tool in promoting these trends is extensive military-to-military exchanges between U.S. DoD personnel and service members of the PLA. By promoting current efforts to professionalize and depoliticize the officer corps of the Chinese military, the U.S. government can help reduce the likelihood of the armed forces of both nations being drawn into combat operations against one another and promote the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Strait crisis.

### 3. Maintenance of U.S. Regional Influence

The rise of China's economic influence throughout East Asia has been paralleled by an increased ability to project its political influence into parts of the region that have heretofore been predominantly under the sway of U.S. interests. Various indicators of this loss of influence have come to light in recent years, demonstrating the PRC's rise in political, economic, and military power with respect to its neighbors and regional trading partners. As China surpassed the United States in total trade volume with the Republic of

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<sup>14</sup> "2004 White Paper: American Business in China-Property Rights," *American Chamber of Commerce-PRC*, 2004; [On-line] available from <http://www.amcham-china.org.cn/publications/white/2004/en-23.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

Korea, U.S. sway over that long time ally began to wane.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Chinese investment in major infrastructure projects throughout the Philippines, such as rail lines in central Luzon, will have a similar effect of reducing the benefits of following Washington's lead on various topics of mutual interest and concern.<sup>16</sup> Direct military sales and financial aid, in addition to extensive cooperation between Chinese and Burmese business interests, has solidified PRC hold over that country's government, a junta that has been long beyond the U.S. government's influence.<sup>17</sup> Geographic proximity, cultural affinity and historic relationships put China at a distinct advantage over the United States in its ability to shape the political landscape of East and Southeast Asia. As China becomes less belligerent, offering incentives for cooperation instead of issuing demands and threats, PRC soft power will grow further still and eventually supplant the United States as the dominant political influence in the western Pacific.

Security cooperation and political engagement provide exceptional opportunities for averting the eventuality of diminishing U.S. influence in Asia. By remaining engaged in the region through military exercises, disaster relief, counter-drug and counter-terrorism efforts, the United States demonstrates an enduring commitment to the well-being of Asia's developing nations and the various transitional democracies struggling to consolidate their rule. Policies of containment or isolationism are counterproductive to the achievement of U.S. interests in the region and strategies that discourage these xenophobic attitudes must be pursued, if the United States is to remain a valued partner in East Asian commerce and political discourse. Military exchange programs and confidence building exercises with various Asian partners will be invaluable in demonstrating the United States' enduring commitment to the region and revealing America's strategic intention to remain an active participant in East and Southeast Asian affairs. By engaging with the PLA, the United States government reveals its willingness

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Snyder and Ah Young Kim, "Special Annual Issue 'China-ROK-U.S. Relations and Regional Security in Northeast Asia,'" *Center for Strategic and International Studies Pacific Forum - Comparative Connections* (July 2003). [On-line] available from: [http://www.csis.org/pacfor/annual/2003\\_report.pdf](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/annual/2003_report.pdf); Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

<sup>16</sup> "GMA is Back from China with \$1 Billion Worth of New Investments, other Business Pacts," *Office of the Press Secretary – Manila, Philippines*, 4 September 2004; [On-line] available from: <http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/archives2004/sept04.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

<sup>17</sup> "Special Report: Jiang Zemin's Burma Trip (12-15 December 2001)" *Virtual Information Center*, 17 December 2001; [On-line] available from: <http://www.vic-info.org/RegionsTop.nsf/0/264dd2f145ba57730a256b2500736e07>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.



to cooperate and compromise on issues of mutual concern. Instead of using the time-tested practice of suspending high-level military talks in response to the crisis du jour, if the United States were to use scheduled meetings to discuss sources of discord on particular policy decisions, DoD seniors could build mutual trust with their counterparts at the PRC Ministry of Defense, Central Military Commission, and PLA Headquarters. By unilaterally extending this olive branch of continued cooperation during future crises, the United States can engender an environment of empathic good faith such that the PRC may be less inclined to suspend military-to-military relations in the reactionary fashion of the past.

## B. MAJOR REGIONAL TRENDS

Strategic trends in China's economic growth, political stability and military build-up reveal a nation rising to major regional power status within the next decade. While Beijing has begun efforts to slow China's economic growth to reduce the effects of inflation, increases in gross domestic product (GDP) exceeding any other large economy on earth are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Anti-corruption campaigns within the CCP and efforts to build intra-party democracy and open elections of political leadership below province level may all combine to provide a stabilizing effect on civil society, build domestic support for CCP single party rule and enhance PRC political prestige throughout the region. Additionally, present trends in China's military force modernization, officer corps professionalization, and the PLA's regional influence as a political force will combine to create a substantial source of concern for U.S. policy makers and military leaders.<sup>18</sup>

### 1. Build-Up and Modernization for Cross-Strait Operations

The most destabilizing of recent trends in East Asia is the rapid build-up of PLA initial strike capability in Fujian Province, opposite Taiwan, and the apparent goal of specific military modernization efforts on-going throughout the PLA, PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN). In order to maintain a viable coercive force to deter Taiwanese independence, the PLA has deployed in excess of 450 conventional surface-

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<sup>18</sup> David Isenberg, "The PLA, the Pentagon, and Politics," *Asia Times On-line*, 18 July 2002; [Online] available from: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/DG18Ad03.html>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

to-surface missiles (SSMs) well within range of most major military, political and key infrastructure targets throughout the island. At the rate of production reported by various sources, many analysts project the number of deployed missile systems to increase beyond 600 by the year 2005.<sup>19</sup> Of primary concern is that this force's preemptive strike capability could enable the PLA to achieve victory over the greatly outnumbered Taiwanese military before the United States could bring sufficient forces to bear to repel an invasion. Furthermore, the purchase, and continuing delivery, of Russian-built Su-27 and Su-30 third generation fighter aircraft has enabled rapid modernization of the PLAAF air superiority and tactical strike capabilities.<sup>20</sup> Paired with advanced AA-12 Adder air-to-air missiles and a significant stock of precision guided munitions (PGMs), these newly acquired weapon systems provide the first leg of a high-tech area denial capability specifically designed to defend against U.S. intervention against possible invasion.

The second weapon system in this modernization effort is the Sovremenny-class guided missile destroyer and its extremely capable anti-ship missile, the SS-N-22 Sunburn. These ships, also purchased from Russia, do not compare with Taiwanese or U.S. destroyers in terms of anti-air warfare, but the Sunburn missile was specifically designed to target U.S. aircraft carriers and will be a force to contend with before carrier strike groups can engage in Taiwan's defense.<sup>21</sup> Finally, while the surface and air capabilities of both the PRC and Taiwan are comparable (with PLA numerical superiority often offsetting Taiwanese technological advantage), recent additions to the PLAN subsurface warfare capability represent a substantial advantage for the PRC under the Taiwan Strait. Four Kilo-class diesel submarines, acquired from Russia in the mid-1990s, are quieter and more capable of establishing no-go zones for U.S. carrier strike groups for the potentially short period of time required to provide the world with a fait accompli invasion by PLA forces.<sup>22</sup> These trends in force procurement and modernization will continue for the foreseeable future and, if it is to avert their use against Taiwan, the

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Gertz, "China Points More Missiles at Taiwan." *Washington Times*, 23 November 1999; [Online] available from: <http://www.taiwandc.org/washt9905.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

<sup>20</sup> David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 262.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 273.

United States must continue to support the maintenance of the status quo with regard to Taiwan's nebulous standing as neither a nation-state nor an subservient province under CCP rule.

## 2. Officer Corps Professionalization

Since 1978, the PLA has implemented significant reforms to its weapons inventory, rank system and organizational structure. Sweeping changes were necessary in order to undo many of the systemic failings caused by decades of diplomatic and economic isolation, the disintegration of the military's core competencies during the Cultural Revolution, and hard-line Maoist doctrine that favored political criteria over technological expertise in PLA leadership.<sup>23</sup> Under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and now Hu Jintao, the PLA officer corps has developed from a highly dedicated, yet poorly trained, cadre leading teeming masses of incapable troops, into highly-specialized, technically-adept, leaders of a downsized, but well-trained, military force.<sup>24</sup> This trend represents both a potential challenge and a significant opportunity for the United States government and DoD personnel responsible for implementing U.S. China policy.

As the PLA officer corps becomes more educated, the overall capability of the PRC armed forces will be greatly magnified. In-depth training on the employment of the advanced weapons systems purchased from abroad will allow combat pilots and naval warfare specialists to utilize new aircraft, ships and submarines to their full potential. Advanced management and logistics techniques will make the PRC art of war into a science of efficient application of force, manpower and resources to achieve tactical and strategic goals.<sup>25</sup> This effort to educate has been accompanied by campaigns to depoliticize the officer corps, reduce corruption throughout the ranks and eliminate ancillary tasks (such as managing commercial ventures) from the PLA's core responsibilities, in order to allow the military to focus on its mission of protecting the homeland and supporting the state's foreign policy agenda.<sup>26</sup> By reducing the strength of

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<sup>23</sup> Macfarquhar, 376.

<sup>24</sup> James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1997), 77.

<sup>25</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> James Mulvenon. "China: Conditional Compliance," in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 329.



these distracting influences, the PRC government has created a focused, proficient and professional military force capable of projecting state power beyond its national borders. As such, for many American policymakers, the modern PLA represents a real threat to the achievement of U.S. national interests in the region, but it will also act as a stabilizing force both within China and throughout the region.<sup>27</sup>

During these recent decades of defense reform and political liberalization, the PLA senior officer corps has become younger, more technically specialized and less politically active. Barring any major change in the Taiwan question, these characteristics may inculcate a less belligerent outlook toward the U.S. government and its allies in the Asia-Pacific area. This may, in turn, provide common ground from which stable military-to-military relations can grow into cooperative efforts to further reduce historic cultural and ideological antagonistic sentiments that still exist between the United States and China. Furthermore, increased levels of professionalism throughout the PLA ranks may generate a greater sense of responsibility to the common citizenry of the PRC that will reduce the military's role in suppressing domestic political dissenters and popular protests such as the uprising in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Cultivating this leadership development trend in the PLA is a precarious proposition, with both potential costs and promising benefits to U.S. foreign policy initiatives in East and Southeast Asia in the coming decades.

### 3. Expansion of Regional Political-Military Influence

In recent years, the PRC's Ministry of Defense has extended its relations with counterpart institutions of its neighboring countries and friendly states throughout the Third World.<sup>28</sup> China has sent high level emissaries of its defense establishment to engage foreign heads of state and their military representatives in constructive discussions with increasing frequency and expanding the scope of many security cooperation agreements with key nations in Asia. An example of these strengthening ties can be found in recent Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) exercises with China's

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<sup>27</sup> You Ji, "China: From Revolutionary Tool to Professional Military," in *Military Professionalism in Asia: Concepts and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Honolulu: East West Center, 2001), 129.

<sup>28</sup> PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2004*. (December 2004); [Online] available from: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/whitepaper/defense2004/defense2004.html>; Internet; accessed 23 Jan 2005.

Central Asian co-members designed to build mutually reinforcing operations procedures and force structures for dealing with terrorism and insurgencies in the western PRC province of Xinjiang.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, combined naval exercises with Russia and joint sea rescue operations with Pakistan demonstrate a deepening of military diplomacy and collective security institution building in response to a perceived expansion of U.S. armed activism and hegemonic tendencies.<sup>30</sup> While not as yet a direct threat to U.S. engagement policies with nations in the region, China's expanding defense collaboration efforts represent an alternative to the United States that less powerful regional actors can turn to when an alliance with America proves undesirable. Vigilant and conciliatory engagement with nations on China's periphery will become more and more necessary to counteract this trend that could constitute the development of an Asian power bloc set in opposition to U.S. goals in the western Pacific area.

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<sup>29</sup> "Anti-Terror Center in Central Asia to be Launched," *Reuters*, 24 September 2003; [On-line] available from: <http://www.etaiwannews.com/China/2003/09/24/1064368244.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 Jan 2005.

<sup>30</sup> "China and Pakistan to Hold Joint Naval Exercises," *People's Daily* (Beijing), 22 October 2003; [On-line] available from: [http://english.people.com.cn/200310/22/eng20031022\\_126587.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200310/22/eng20031022_126587.shtml); Internet; accessed 23 Jan 2005.

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## II. CONTAINMENT VERSUS ENGAGEMENT

The ongoing debate in the United States concerning military relations with the People's Republic of China revolves around the benefits and risks entailed in either of two dominant paradigms. Given many long years of Cold War 'containment' policy directed against the spread of communism and its apparent threat to the fundamental ideals of American democracy, it is little surprise that vestiges of this exclusionary mentality remain in today's vastly altered global political environment. By applying a realist approach to analyzing the changing world order, the United States can achieve some benefits by containing China's economic, political and military rise in the coming decades.<sup>31</sup> However, the high costs that the U.S. government would invoke through adherence to this antiquated policy would far outweigh its benefits in a post-Cold War age of highly integrated global economies and the inevitable intertwining of national interests that it brings. The tangible economic benefits of positive relations with the PRC shared by American consumers would undermine efforts to build a domestic consensus against China's peaceful rise. Furthermore, broad ranging efforts to isolate the PRC would also require the backing of many, if not all, of China's neighbors, allies and trading partners to ensure that modernization (both military and technological) were stymied for the foreseeable future.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, comprehensive engagement policies are highly controversial in the United States due to the perception that economic, technical and military cooperation with the PRC only serves to strengthen a potential adversary in ways that directly undermine U.S. national security. Arguments against constructive engagement policies with regard to improved economic and political relations with the PRC were especially high in the wake of reports of China's efforts to obtain U.S. nuclear weapons design information through espionage.<sup>33</sup> However, efforts to engage China throughout the 1980s

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<sup>31</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad and others, *The United States and a Rising China* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 69.

<sup>32</sup> Khalilzad, 71.

<sup>33</sup> John F. Harris and Vernon Loeb, "Spy Case Tests U.S. Openness With China: Engagement Policy Failing, Critics Say." *Washington Post*, 14 March 1999, A01. [On-line] available from: <http://www.taiwandc.org/wp-9908.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 Jan 2005.

and 1990s represented significant steps forward in promoting China's incorporation into global economic and political institutions on terms consistent with U.S. policy designs.<sup>34</sup> Each of these two approaches has significant costs and benefits for the future of U.S. interests in Asia, and yet the choice to proceed along one line of policy versus the other tends to rely strongly on perceptions of China as a threat to the American way of life or as a benevolent partner in the development of pan-Pacific economic prosperity and the promotion of democratic principles and basic human rights. During the coming decade, U.S. and Chinese leaders will continue to build political and economic relationships that benefit their respective national interests and conform to personal paradigms concerning the level of threat their opposite number poses to the achievement of national goals.

#### A. CONTAINMENT

Throughout the Cold War, the United States applied significant political and military pressure to ensure that communism did not spread beyond the confines of the Soviet Union and its satellite nations. When Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces failed to consolidate power, lost the bloody civil war against Mao Tse-tung's Communist army and fled to Formosa, American policy-makers embarked on an invasive search for the culprit responsible for "losing China". Continuing diplomatic recognition of Chiang's regime as the legal government of mainland China, prosecuting the Korean War in order to roll back the Soviet and Chinese-backed invasion of southern Korea and isolating the PRC from the rapidly intertwining global economy were but a few of the tools applied to limit Mao's ability to spread his ideology in the 1950s and early 1960s. Building on the Truman Doctrine, which thrust the United States into its role as protector of "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures,"<sup>35</sup> Presidents Truman and Eisenhower applied the evolving principles of containment to supporting anti-communist forces in Southeast Asia, most openly in Vietnam. While direct combat with the PLA ended with the Korean Armistice, military confrontation and the threat of conflict would continue with regard to U.S. support of the Republic of China on Taiwan.

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholas R. Lardy, "Issues in China's WTO Accession," *The U.S.-China Security Review Commission* (May 9, 2001); [On-line] available from: <http://www.brook.edu/views/testimony/lardy/20010509>; Internet; accessed 20 Jan 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Harry S. Truman. Speech before a Joint Session of Congress. 12 March 1947. [On-line]; available from <http://www.luminet.net/~tgort/truman.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 Mar 2005.

During the Taiwan Straits crises of 1954-55 and 1958, the United States implied that the use of nuclear weapons and massive conventional forces were viable options for defending its national interests in East Asia, namely its unique relationship with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. While these crises ended in compromise and de-escalation, both events intensified feelings of national animosity that would undermine efforts at peaceful coexistence over the course of the next twenty years. Throughout this period, the proxy war that emerged in Vietnam after America's substantial build-up and support of the Republic of South Vietnam evolved into an all out struggle to limit Chinese and Soviet influence in the developing world. Over the course of the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations continued to apply the U.S. military in a containment role throughout continental and insular Southeast Asia. American combat operations against PRC-supported North Vietnam were complemented by extensive military engagement with the Kingdom of Thailand and the Republic of the Philippines, thus denying the PRC influence in the region and firmly entrenching those allies in the Cold War struggle for power.

1. Costs of Containment

While the global political environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has moved beyond the nuclear brinksmanship of the Cold War, many American and Chinese policy-makers still weigh relative gains and losses of international prestige, political influence or economic benefits using the same outdated metrics as were used over fifty years ago. Today, the costs of constraining or deterring China from developing relationships with its neighbors and expanding its economy to include extensive trade with the industrialized nations of the world must be calculated within a dynamic new international system.<sup>36</sup> Given the wide range of multinational corporations and nongovernmental organizations with sufficient power to influence the direction of global industrial development and the increased worldwide interconnectivity made possible by information age technologies, using the antiquated litmus test of maintaining the balance-of-power status quo appears ludicrous. The global market economy has enabled increased quality of life in developing nations, including significant benefits to the underemployed masses in China, reduced costs on a wide variety of products once produced in the costly labor markets of the

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<sup>36</sup> David Shambaugh, "Containment or Engagement of China?," *International Security* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), 186.



developed world and brought cultures closer together through commerce and peaceful interaction. Containing China, one of the world's most dynamic and growing economies would significantly retard these trends and cause a significant stagnation in the global market as well as reduce the liberalizing effects of a rapidly growing middle class. As many newly industrialized countries have discovered, the influence of businessmen, urban professionals and a civically responsible middle class can act as a powerful stabilizing force in an unconsolidated democracy and a strong motivator for autocratic regimes to honor the demands of its citizenry.

Added to the international economic and political destabilizing effects of an American containment policy of China, the use of the U.S. military to implement this program will create contentious situations and build tensions that could easily bring about the East Asian crisis that both sides presently work diligently to avoid.<sup>37</sup> As demonstrated in the EP-3 incident of 2001, bringing U.S. military forces and the PLA in close proximity in an antagonistic posture can lead to a rapid decline in relations and a potential escalatory spiral in domestic nationalism that demands a confrontation. By removing the possibility of resolving the Taiwan question through peaceful discourse, implementing a military encirclement program using regional basing and strengthened alliances and breaking off security dialogue through which misunderstanding and miscommunications are eliminated, the United States may back the PRC into a position from which reunification by force is the only option. Furthermore, in the present defense posture and national security environment that places global anti-terror operations at the top of the list of military priorities, too few forces are available to implement a successful military confrontation with a determined PLA organization. Necessary increases in American defense spending, already at record highs due to Global War on Terror operations and the occupation of Iraq, would act as a drain on the nation's productive capacities and further delay recovery from the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> economic recession.

## 2. Benefits of Containment

Taken in terms of absolute global influence, China's industrial, political and military modernization efforts of the past thirty years present a direct challenge to U.S.

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<sup>37</sup> William Perry, "Engage China, Not Contain It," *Secretary of Defense Remarks to the Washington State China Relations Council* (30 October 1995); [On-line] available from: <http://www.fas.org/news/china/1995/di10109.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 Feb 2005.

dominance of the international balance of power as it has existed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Proponents of a modern day containment policy purport that the PRC views the western-centric restructuring of the global market economy and redistribution of resources following World War II as inherently biased against China taking its rightful place as a dominant force in East Asia. This sentiment is repeated often in Mao's rhetoric railing against capitalist imperialism and Western domination of the existing international order.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, similar arguments point to China as a "non-status quo" power constantly disregarding established norms and rules of the game.<sup>39</sup> Viewed in this light, a policy of comprehensive containment, with an aggressive military posture at its core, appears to be the best possible solution to maintaining American dominance in the international system of nations. Containment would force China to return to an inefficient system of autarky which would effectively halt the rapid economic growth trend that has become the norm during the past decade.

Proponents of a revived policy of PRC containment cite seemingly endless examples of Chinese perfidy, subversion and insincerity in their foreign relations with the United States as overwhelming justification for an aggressive posture against the world's last major communist power.

The People's Republic of China is the most serious national security threat the United States faces at present and will remain so into the foreseeable future. This grave strategic threat includes the disruption of vital U.S. interests in the Pacific region and even the possibility of a nuclear war that could cost millions of American lives.<sup>40</sup>

Manipulation of Chinese domestic press to foment anti-American sentiments among its constituency during recent crises, including the Belgrade embassy bombing and EP-3 collision has also been described by containment advocates as an example of the continuing totalitarian nature of communist China and overt evidence that the CCP views

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<sup>38</sup> Chen Jian, "The China Challenge in the Twenty-first Century: Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy," United States Institute for Peace, (June 1988); [On-line] available from: [http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/chen21/chap2\\_21.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/chen21/chap2_21.html); Internet; accessed 9 Mar 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "China and the Global Order," *Centerpiece*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Fall 2001), 2; [e-journal] available from: <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/misc/publications/centerpieceFall2001.pdf>; Internet; accessed 6 Feb 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic of China Targets America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2002), 199.

the U.S. government as its most dangerous opponent. Furthermore, recent scandals revealing PRC involvement in American presidential and congressional election financing, business arrangements with the potential to undermine U.S. national security and nuclear espionage further incited American domestic political sentiment against engagement with 'Red China'.<sup>41</sup>

However, this limited perspective ignores many of the political and economic realities of today. Enforcing a containment policy would require the cooperation of China's many global trading partners to be successful. Given the high levels of economic interdependence between China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, various nations of South and Southeast Asia as well as the European Union, this prospect seems extremely remote. Furthermore, the PLA's growing capacity for power projection and the myriad of shared interests between the PRC and the various governments of the Asia Pacific region make it highly unlikely that China's neighbors would enter into an openly hostile military alliance with the United States. These limited benefits and the low prospect of a successful implementation should point American political leaders well away from this policy relic of days long gone, yet core cultural differences and a history of distrust continue to drive a wedge between these two nations that will likely remain for many years to come.

## B. ENGAGEMENT

The future development of military-to-military relationships between China and the United States will be based upon threat perceptions and the relative costs and benefits that they have for both sides, just as they have in preceding decades. Since the establishment of relations with the PRC during the Nixon Administration, the United States has struggled to achieve appropriate levels of military engagement with China. Using improved political relations with the PRC to balance against Soviet expansionism during the early 1970s served to encourage Russian leaders to explore avenues of détente. However, many within the U.S. State Department warned that close military relations with China would only serve to ruin the delicate balance between the United States and

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<sup>41</sup> James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, From Nixon to Clinton* (New York, Vintage Books, 2000), 351.

Soviet Union. Given these sets of restraints, it is little wonder that military cooperation during the Nixon and Ford Administrations were primarily limited to,

...American statements of support for Chinese security against a Soviet attack and Chinese cooperation with American regional policy toward Korea, Japan, and Indochina.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, during the Carter Administration, military cooperation was primarily limited to those exchanges, delegations and information sharing programs that would bolster China's ability to resist Soviet influence, but not disrupt the Cold War balance of power.<sup>43</sup> Even after normalization of relations in 1979, efforts to expand the security relationship between the United States and China proved to be illusory machinations meant to deter Soviet aggression without substantial commitment on the part of either Washington or Beijing.<sup>44</sup>

While the success of efforts to improve military relations with China during the 1980s was limited, the U.S. commitment to do so was finally codified by President Reagan's Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. The announcement that future security cooperation between the United States and the PRC would be based upon the "three pillars" of high level visits, functional exchanges and sales of defensive military equipment gave structure to a nebulous area of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> However, American popular response to the June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, wherein PLA forces were used to suppress pro-democracy demonstrators, caused President George H.W. Bush to suspend military-to-military exchanges as part of a massive sanctions package.<sup>46</sup> Even though China's diplomatic cooperation leading up to Operation DESERT STORM yielded a short reprieve from vocal condemnation by the American public and high-level

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<sup>42</sup> Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China Since 1972* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1992), 88.

<sup>43</sup> Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), 7.

<sup>44</sup> Pollpeter, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Jer Donald Get, *What's with the Relationship between America's Army and China's PLA?: An Examination of the Terms of the U.S. Army's Strategic Peacetime Engagement with the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Jing-dong Yuan, "Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen: Restoration, Progress, and Pitfalls," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly* (Spring 2003): 52.



military contacts resumed shortly thereafter, the precedent for an ad hoc start-and-stop program of security cooperation had been set.

During President Clinton's first term in office, Secretary of Defense William Perry initiated the most significant PLA engagement plans to date on the grounds that,

Our security posture dramatically improves if China cooperates with us. In order to regain that cooperation, we must rebuild mutual trust and understanding with the PLA, and this could only happen through high-level dialogue and working level contacts.<sup>47</sup>

Because U.S.-PRC security relations held a position of prominence within President Clinton's comprehensive engagement program, military-to-military contacts were able to withstand the strain of the June 1995 visit of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's visit to Cornell University and the subsequent PLA missile tests conducted in the waters near Taipei in July. While this series of events was not accompanied by a halting of military visits, further missile tests in March 1996, meant to dissuade the Taiwanese public from re-electing President Lee, were met with a six-month cessation of exchanges (as well as the presence of two American carrier battle groups in the Philippine Sea).<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the cancellation of several key military-to-military events after the May 1999 inadvertent bombing of the PRC embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia by American forces operating against the Milosevic regime was short lived. It follows that Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell's November 1999 visit to Beijing should have heralded a return to previously high levels of security cooperation between American and Chinese military officials.<sup>49</sup> However, this would not be the case. Due to U.S. domestic political fallout from the nuclear espionage issue and continuing concerns about PRC long-term goals, Congress implemented highly restrictive controls on future military exchanges with the PLA in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2000.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, Memorandum for the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, "U.S.-China Military Relationship," (August 1994); [On-line] available from: <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB19/12-01.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 Jan 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Pollpeter, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser "Progress Amidst Persisting Deep Suspicions," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Pacific Forum - Comparative Connections* (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1999). [On-line] available from: [http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/994Qus\\_china.html](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/994Qus_china.html); Internet; accessed 24 Jan 2005.

<sup>50</sup> United States Congress, Public Law 106-65 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, "Section 1201-Limitation on military-to-military exchanges and contacts with Chinese People's



These controls remained in place throughout the first George W. Bush presidency and were integrated into a standing Pentagon review and approval process which allowed a semblance of regularity to contacts between U.S. and Chinese military personnel. While the U.S. Navy EP-3 Orion surveillance plane incident of April 2001 caused a short period of high tension between the two governments, military contacts were halted only briefly and then allowed to continue on a case-by-case basis by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. Among the substantive meetings held in the months following the EP-3 incident was the September 2001 discussion of how to avoid future incidents of this type held under the auspices of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center provided a new potential foundation for U.S.-PRC relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the perceived common threat of global terrorist organizations, both U.S. policymakers and top PRC leadership began to recognize the mutual benefit of combining efforts against this new foe.<sup>52</sup> While intelligence sharing and consultation on terrorist movements in Central and Southeast Asia continued throughout President Bush's first term of office,<sup>53</sup> building a broad-ranging, cooperative relationship between the Department of Defense and the PLA will require years of confidence building measures before an environment of mutual trust will be solidified.

#### 1. Costs of Engagement

Throughout the Clinton presidency, a wide spectrum of media reporting and Congressional findings condemned defense cooperation elements of the White House's comprehensive engagement program for undermining U.S. national security. The 1999 Report of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China (better known as Liberation Army," (5 October 1999); [On-line] available from: [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=106\\_cong\\_public\\_laws&docid=f:publ065.106](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=106_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ065.106); Internet; accessed 25 Jan 2005.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "U.S. Concludes Military Talks with China," 15 September 2001, [On-line] available from: [http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2001/b09152001\\_bt432-01.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2001/b09152001_bt432-01.html); Internet; accessed 26 Jan 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser "Terrorist Strike Gives U.S.-China Ties a Boost," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Pacific Forum - Comparative Connections* (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2001). [On-line] available from: [http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0103Qus\\_china.html](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0103Qus_china.html); Internet; accessed 26 Jan 2005.

<sup>53</sup> PRC Embassy to the United States, "China, US Anti-Terrorism Experts to Hold New Round of Consultation in June," 13 April 2004, [On-line] available from: <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t84349.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 Jan 2005.

the Cox Report) recognized a number of practices in U.S.-PRC relations that significantly harmed American national interests.<sup>54</sup> Specific examples of PLA modernization efforts based either upon available U.S. doctrine or specific information exchange sessions led many policy pundits to regard broad-ranging security cooperation with China as efforts to empower a future enemy. For example, observations of U.S. military operations since 1991, as well as PLA requests for information regarding U.S. advanced defense logistics procedures and organization, resulted in a major restructuring of the PLA General Logistics Department.<sup>55</sup> While cooperation between the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), the US Air Force (USAF) and the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has made Chinese civil aviation safer and more efficient in recent years, accusations of parallel efforts to significantly improve PLAAF combat capability cast doubts on the wisdom of this engagement program as well.<sup>56</sup>

Given the rise of Chinese military power over the past decade and the potential for direct conflict between the United States and PRC over the Taiwan issue, supporting the repressive communist government's ability to more effectively impose its will on smaller regional powers through force appears counterproductive. Providing the PLA insight into the full spectrum of Defense Department tactical, operational and strategic military capabilities could undermine American ability to defend its interests in East Asia and maintain the dominant U.S. position in the Asia Pacific region. Added to this are continuing assertions of a lack of reciprocal treatment in military relations for which many cannot see a benefit for the United States.<sup>57</sup> However, given the growing economic interdependence between these two nations, the expanding cultural ties between their citizens, and the recognized social and political detriments that armed conflict between America and China would bring, cooperation in the security arena, regardless of losses in

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China; [On-line] available from: <http://www.house.gov/coxreport/>; Internet; accessed 27 Jan 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Allen and Eric McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations* (Washington, D.C.: The Stimson Center, 1999), 36.

<sup>56</sup> Xinhua News Agency. "Chinese Civil Aviation Set to Take Off," (10 September 2002); [On-line] available from: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/BAT/42435.htm>; Internet; accessed 27 Jan 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The 'Adults' Make A Mess," *The Weekly Standard* (14 May 2001). Available from: <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/583oglxj.asp>; Internet; accessed 27 Jan 2005.

absolute military power, is warranted. As political, economic and civil-military relations reforms take hold in 21<sup>st</sup> century China, American expectations for responsible behavior in PRC domestic and international affairs may begin to be realized. U.S. engagement with the PLA, as well as mutual exposure to each side's decision-making processes and organizational structures will also prevent disastrous miscalculations and miscommunications as we proceed into a dangerous period for pan-Pacific relations.

## 2. Benefits of Engagement

Strategic discourse between high-level officials of the U.S. and PRC governments over the past three decades has paid significant dividends in areas of mutual interest. Among these are changing patterns in PRC adherence to international conventions regarding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and arms trafficking to developing nations listed as areas of concern by Pentagon.<sup>58</sup> By engaging in open discourse under such constructs as the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, each nation not only addresses functional issues of concern, both parties alter their expectations regarding the behavior of their opposite number. However, high-level discussions can often be undermined by intransigent attitudes from either of the participants. Much of U.S. engagement policy during the first Clinton Administration was based on the premise that economic and security cooperation would force China to accept Western approved policy positions through the judicious application of pressures and inducements.<sup>59</sup> In this environment, PRC leaders had a strong tendency to resist such efforts to modify their behavior as most policymakers viewed the bilateral relationship as a zero-sum game; any political gains by the United States represented a loss of regional influence or national face. Given a relationship that has long been highly charged with domestic nationalist forces demanding hard-line stances against appeasement or the humiliation of political capitulation, it is little wonder that the past quarter century of official diplomatic relations have done little to abate the general feelings of distrust shared by both sides.

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<sup>58</sup> Marc Lynch, "Why Engage? China and the Logic of Communicative Engagement," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (2002): 203.

<sup>59</sup> Lynch. 201.



Many proponents of U.S.-PRC military engagement have been disappointed by the lack of overt gain achieved over the course of recent decades, especially in areas of direct influence on key decisions or enhanced communication during times of crisis.<sup>60</sup> However, in addition to the aforementioned progress in weapons non-proliferation, including PRC acceptance of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and promises to adhere to the restrictions set forth in the Missile Technology Control Regime, military exchanges and interlocution have developed mutual recognition of each side's capabilities and level of professionalism. Furthermore, continuous requests for increased transparency in this most important of security relationships by the United States and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) have resulted in the PLA publication of four "white papers" on China's national security priorities and concerns.<sup>61</sup> This movement toward accepting the norms of behavior in foreign policy and security affairs established by the Western-dominated international system brings the PRC closer to the American preconceived notion of a responsible nation-state and bodes well for potential partnership in other areas of mutual interest. By improving military relations with the PLA, the United States can further its own national interests while promoting a new paradigm in security cooperation not constrained by Cold War concepts such as "zero-sum" diplomacy and "balance of power" politics.

### C. OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

Throughout the short history of U.S.-PRC relations, Department of Defense efforts to expand military relations with the PLA have faced significant hurdles from both sides of the Pacific. Even prior to the establishment of the communist government, U.S. policy-makers and security specialists were divided over how best to interact with Mao Tse-tung's forces during the later years of World War II.<sup>62</sup> During the campaign against the Japanese occupation of China, General Joseph Stillwell recognized the potential

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<sup>60</sup> Pollpeter, 49.

<sup>61</sup> The latest of these national security white papers continues to emphasize increasing PRC comprehensive national security through economic growth while maintaining national sovereignty and reunification with Taiwan as its highest priority. PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2004*. (December 2004); [On-line] available from: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/whitepaper/defense2004/defense2004.html>; Internet; accessed 1 Feb 2005.

<sup>62</sup> "Dixie Mission Remembered in Beijing." *People's Daily* (Beijing), 25 August 2004; [On-line] available from: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2004/Aug/105006.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 Feb 2005.

benefit Mao's insurgency could hold for Allied operations in the Pacific and lobbied President Roosevelt to authorize a group of liaison officers to engage with the communists to assess their capabilities. Given the total war mindset of 1944, it was little wonder that the President authorized this mission and took advantage of any possible opportunity to turn the balance in Asia in favor of the Allied Powers. However, even as the mission began to report on the strength of the communist position behind Japanese lines and the positive local response that Mao's approach to engendering the good will of villages under their sway, political forces in Washington shifted against the pro-communist line and solidified behind the Nationalist Chinese under Chiang Kai-shek.

This "Dixie Mission" to liaise with the Yen'an insurgents held the potential to create an era of peaceful engagement between the communist Chinese and the United States military, yet differences in ideology overrode pragmatic concerns in the waning days of World War II. Likewise, countervailing ideologies, miscommunications and issues of core national interest thrust U.S. forces and the PLA into direct combat on the Korean Peninsula and indirect conflict in Vietnam over the course of the following three decades. Later, ideological differences began to soften with the moderating influence of Deng Xiaoping's opening to the West. His reform policies, designed to bring the PRC economy, industrial base and military forces in line with the predominant measures of modern national success began the process of integrating China into the global economy and diplomatic, cultural and military exchanges with the United States saw significant expansion during the late 1970s and 1980s. The Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 reminded the American people of the gulf of ideological and cultural differences between themselves and the PRC government and this hurdle has proven nearly insurmountable in recent years.

During the 1990s, the removal of the Soviet threat to American national interests eliminated the need to play "the China card" to balance against Russian expansion. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a shift in U.S. policy-makers' tolerance for engagement with "Red China," especially in light of its continued repression of democratic movements and religious groups due to their perceived threat to continued CCP rule. Most recently, the primary obstacle to positive relations between the United States and PRC has been each nation's relations with the Republic of China (ROC) on

Taiwan. While the 1995-96 Taiwan Straits crisis exacerbated American fears of a growing threat of PRC regional hegemony and its expanding military capacity to influence the Asian balance of power, the continuing U.S. policy of providing defensive arms to the ROC is a constant point of contention with the PRC government.<sup>63</sup> These strategic issues of contending national interests establish the tense environment within which U.S.-PRC military-to-military relations must operate. However, there are several procedural and cultural barriers to establishing meaningful and sustained security dialogue that have yet to be overcome.

1. Reciprocity

A recurring theme in American military engagement circles refers to a lack of reciprocity in the number, type and quality of exchanges between the United States and China.

The PLA carefully orchestrates its bilateral exchanges to maximize benefits for itself and, through use of limited reciprocity and transparency, to minimize the amount of information the PLA provides to other countries.<sup>64</sup>

American Defense Attaché Officers and high-level military officials complain of repeated visits to PLA showcase units of little or no strategic value and functional level exchanges that reveal nothing of the capabilities or intentions of the China defense sector. Similarly, many foreign policy pundits in the United States denigrate Pentagon engagement efforts as providing deep insight into American operational capabilities and strategic doctrine and argue that these exchanges should be severely curtailed.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, American military observers have had difficulty in securing invitations to advanced war fighting exercises, such as the massive “Iron Fist” division-level live-fire event held at Queshan

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<sup>63</sup> “US Arms Sales to Taiwan Harm Straits Peace,” *People’s Daily* (Beijing), 19 June 2004; [On-line] available from: [http://english.people.com.cn/200406/19/eng20040619\\_146883.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200406/19/eng20040619_146883.html); Internet; accessed 2 Feb 2005.

<sup>64</sup> Allen, 31.

<sup>65</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, “Why Caution Is Needed in Military Contacts with China,” *The Heritage Foundation - Backgrounder #1340* (2 December 1999), [e-journal] available from: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/BG1340.cfm>; Internet; accessed 2 Feb 2005.



Training Base in Henan province in September 2004.<sup>66</sup> Conversely, PLA dignitaries and functional experts have received numerous opportunities to observe war fighting training events, such as the U.S. Air Force's "Red Flag" exercises, U.S. Marine Corps combined arms live-fire events and maneuvers at the U.S. Army's National Training Center.<sup>67</sup> For many U.S. policy-makers, this lack of forthrightness alone is enough to bring out latent feelings of mistrust and provides sufficient validation for proponents of the "China Threat" paradigm to legislate significant restrictions on future engagement efforts.

While this restrictive behavior may seem prudent in order to coerce a truculent adversary into conforming to American expectations, eliminating opportunities to engage in security dialogue restricts both nations' abilities to develop trust and a firm comprehension of the other's motives. In the case of limited reciprocity, PLA officials offer many excuses for their apparent lack of cooperation, some of which are little more than superficial justifications based on inadequate logistics support for high level visits. Chinese defense officials may feel that substandard equipment and poor quality facilities harbor the potential for loss of face and provide damaging revelations concerning the state of readiness of PLA operational forces. Further, the limited number of elite Army, Navy and Air Force units with advanced combat capabilities comparable to those of the U.S. military may also cause Beijing to view these resources as key national assets whose true capabilities are best kept opaque to a potential adversary. While the underlying motivations for this reluctance to reciprocate visits or provide requested information may shed some light on the issue, they do not reveal a means of overcoming American government resistance to continued openness of a seemingly one-sided nature. Only by reaping tangible benefits from this relationship in the short term will the opinion of the American public, and that of their elected representatives, turn from the path of disassociation and limited military engagement.

## 2. Transparency

Closely related to American concerns of non-reciprocal behavior in the military-to-military relationship with China is the continued lack of transparency in a broad range

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<sup>66</sup> "China launches military exercise," *PLA Daily* (Beijing), 27 September 2004; [On-line] available from: [http://english.pladaily.com.cn/english/pladaily/2004/09/27/20040927001003\\_TodayHeadlines.html](http://english.pladaily.com.cn/english/pladaily/2004/09/27/20040927001003_TodayHeadlines.html); Internet; accessed 2 Feb 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Pollpeter, 57.

of issue areas, such as the PLA's strategic intent, management structure, procurement practices and budgetary activities. From a PRC perspective, it may seem like a reasonable hedge against America's unstable foreign policy towards Asia, which threatens complete reversals with each passing administration,<sup>68</sup> to withhold certain defense information in order to maintain an ambiguous position as a deterrent to the United States' new-found unilateralist tendencies. Clashes over definitions of transparency may not drive American and Chinese military forces into violent conflict, but they do heighten some of the basic societal and cultural differences that create the near endless cycle of distrust and withdrawal. First, let us consider that the United States' present dominant position in the global balance-of-power encourages a desire to perpetuate Pax Americana and spread Western-style democracy to the four corners of the earth.<sup>69</sup> This push for global democracy has received a significant boost from the Bush Administration's response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terrorist attacks. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM most effectively demonstrated America's ability and will to forcibly remove an authoritarian regime from the government of another nation in order to promote its own national security irrespective of issues of sovereignty. Next, consider that the People's Republic of China as the sole remaining non-democratic great power has a history of using diplomatic guile to achieve political-military objectives and desires to challenge the status quo of the modern international system of nations.<sup>70</sup> Added to this are diametrically-opposed priorities and definitions of civil liberties that influence the lengths to which each society will go in order to foster openness or curtail civic freedom in order to maintain social and political order.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Douglas H. Paal, "China and the East Asian Security Environment: Complementarity and Competition," in *Living With China: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Ezra F. Vogel (New York: Norton, 1997), 102.

<sup>69</sup> "Bush: Expand Freedom 'In All the World'," *CNN* (Washington), 21 January 2005; [On-line] available from: <http://www.cnn.com/2005/ALLPOLITICS/01/20/bush.inauguration/>; Internet; accessed 10 Mar 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, "Great-Power Cooperation under conditions of Limited Reciprocity: From Empirical to Formal Analysis," *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995): 454.

<sup>71</sup> The example of the American fixation on Constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms of speech, religion and assembly when contrasted with PRC legislation limiting these same civil rights in the name of maintaining national unity and state stability under CCP single party rule highlights this fundamental opposition.



For American citizens, military leaders and policy-makers, transparency in government is a common tool used to build popular support for executive orders, domestic legislation or military operations prior to their execution. In contrast, the PRC's single party system, revolutionary origins and an enduring awareness of social and political forces pulling at the very fabric of their state lead the central authorities to tightly control the flow of information to its people and the outside world. The attendant paranoia that this siege mentality produces is a primary cause of tight-lipped responses from members of the PLA involved in security dialogue with American military personnel. Furthermore, broad-scope state security regulations reinforce this mindset and provide significant disincentives to PLA exchange officers developing responses to queries from their opposite number in the United States.<sup>72</sup>

Added to the wide spectrum of strategic differences between the PRC and American governments, these procedural hindrances often undermine security cooperation efforts to the point that little substantial progress is made toward achieving common goals. However, some U.S. military officials previously involved in security dialogue and liaison efforts relate that a significant portion of this negative perception of PLA transparency could be overcome by eliminating inefficiencies in the exchange process.<sup>73</sup> In the past, poor preparation of personnel participating in country visits has often led to unproductive meetings and a whimsical approach to gathering information about the PLA, its organization or operations. Lack of advance submission of questions likely to be asked by high-level officials during their visits also reinforces the Chinese propensity to be evasive in their responses due to the lack of formal release approval by the chain of command and central party authorities. Lastly, the practice of sending senior officials who are rapidly approaching retirement on exchange visits both minimizes the benefit of established personal connections and sends the message that these visits are of little functional importance to the long-term interests of the United States.

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<sup>72</sup> "New PLA Interior Service & Disciplinary Regulations To Be Enforced," *People's Daily* (Beijing), 8 April 2002; [On-line] available from: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/30252.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 Feb 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Pollpeter, 69.

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### III. U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH TAIWAN

#### A. HISTORY OF U.S. MILITARY RELATIONS WITH THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (ROC) ON TAIWAN

Modern American military engagement with the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan is a complex relationship that began during a time of political upheaval and international crisis. Given the long history of American involvement in Western great power struggles to gain commercial advantage over one another in the Orient, locating the starting point of defense cooperation between the United States and the Chinese nation is a problematic process. Among the earliest programs of American military engagement with China were the unsanctioned exploits of the adventurer-turned-General Frederick Townsend Ward and his mercenary “Ever-Victorious Army.” While his first efforts to form an army to fight the forces of the Taiping Rebellion (for profit and glory) involved specifically the recruitment of European naval deserters and renegades, Ward laid the foundation for Western-style military training programs for Chinese soldiers that exposed thousands of native troops to modern tactics and procedures. As Ward was not an American government official, nor did he represent any national interests of the United States, this 19<sup>th</sup> century episode did little to develop positive U.S.-China relations. Likewise, one can scarcely describe the military enforcement of America’s trade concessions under the “unequal treaties” or the “Boxer Protocol” privilege to permanently deploy protective garrisons to Tianjin as positive efforts to build cooperative security relationships, yet these early encounters would shape social and political perspectives that exist still today.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, the mission of the United States military in China from 1901 until 1937 continued to focus on the defense of American commercial interests with little regard for developing close working relationships with its counterparts within the late-Qing Dynasty forces or the armies of the nascent Republic when it was formed in 1912.

As with most dramatic American policy shifts, constructive military relations with the ROC were established during a crisis situation and in direct response to an imminent

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<sup>74</sup> Dennis L. Noble, *The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937* (New York: Greenwood Press, Penguin Books, 1990), 20.

threat to U.S. national interests. So with the rise of Japanese militancy in the late 1930s, American policy-makers began to see their continuing interests in China come under the threat of becoming consumed within the ever-growing sphere of influence of the Japanese government and its powerful Imperial Army. After the Japanese invasion of 1937 and its attendant physical attacks on U.S. business interests in Shanghai, American political leaders began calling for programs of support for the Chinese people in their struggle against the invaders. During this period prior to the American declaration of war against Japan, groundwork for subsequent substantial military cooperation efforts was laid by Claire Lee Chennault, a retired U.S. Air Force officer under contract to Chiang Kai-shek to organize and train the ROC Air Force. Despite his best efforts, Chennault could do little to improve the poor state of readiness and Chiang's wartime capital of Chungking was under constant threat of attack by Japanese Air Force units.<sup>75</sup> As American public opinion increasingly called for support of China and Japanese atrocities become more widely known, the United States government overtly breached its notional neutrality by establishing a lend-lease program with the ROC and making fighter aircraft immediately available for shipment to Generalissimo Chiang's forces.

Added to this financial and materiel support, U.S. Army military pilots were allowed to "resign" from service and enter into contracts with the ROC as part of Chennault's newly-established America Volunteer Group or "Flying Tigers." Shortly after the United States officially entered the war in the Pacific, General George Stillwell was deployed to Chungking to act as both Chiang's Chief of Staff and commander of all U.S. forces in the China-Burma-India Theater. Military setbacks, evolving global political priorities and diverging grand strategies between the Generalissimo and his American advisors all worked against the development of effective coalition operations or training programs. Liaison between Stillwell and Chiang became more and more difficult as the American took on command of the Chinese Fifth and Sixth Armies in Burma. Insubordination and disregard for the American General's orders were the *modus operandi* for the Generalissimo's field commanders and Stillwell's demands for redress

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<sup>75</sup> Jonathan D. Spense, *To Change China: Western Advisors in China* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 230.

were obfuscated by the Chungking leadership.<sup>76</sup> While the realities of the war in progress relegated military operations on the Asian continent to a peripheral status, significant amounts of materiel and funding continued to flow to the Nationalist government with Chiang Kai-shek at its head. Yet neither this modern material nor talented American advisors could make up for the lack of sound strategic doctrine, resistance to Stillwell's demands for drastic reorganization or the lack of systemic reform of the Chinese military training system.

Throughout the war, relations between Chennault and Chiang flourished, while General Stillwell and his attempts to rebuild the Chinese Army were marginalized and criticized. Chiang continued to demand more and more support from President Roosevelt while large portions of American money and materiel were siphoned off to enrich corrupt government officials, pay-off warlords-turned-Nationalists and supply untrained military forces that were withheld from combat against the Japanese to be used against the Chinese communists once the war was over. However unsuccessful these wartime relations were in their attempts to transform the Nationalist Army, the vast amounts of American time and money spent propping up the ROC government and a highly successful propaganda campaign in the United States bonded the two countries in a security relationship that has continued to today. Concerns about the rise of communism across the globe caused American policy makers to shun overtures from Mao Tse-tung's insurgent group and continue providing limited arms, equipment and financing to the Nationalist forces as they reinitiated civil war combat operations against one another. By 1949, Chiang's government was defeated and forced to retreat to the island of Taiwan, yet the long-standing political-military ties between the United States and the ROC had solidified to the point that American popular support for the right-wing Chinese government demanded continued diplomatic and financial backing in the coming decades.

Throughout the 1950s, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower supported, protected and restrained the ROC through the adroit use of diplomacy, economic aid and the U.S. military. Interposing U.S. forces between Chiang and Mao during the Korean War

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<sup>76</sup> Spense, 245.

ensured that neither party would take advantage of the ongoing conflict to initiate a cross Strait invasion and hence escalate the situation beyond the bounds of the Korean peninsula.<sup>77</sup> The complex interplay of fervent anti-communist domestic sentiments, the containment policy espoused by NSC-68 and the open aggression of PRC forces in Korea forced American policy-makers to remain true to the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek as a beacon of anti-Soviet influence in Asia. During the mid-1960s, however, Washington began to grasp the full implications of the Sino-Soviet split and with this realization came a reduction in the importance of engagement with Chiang's government.<sup>78</sup> Even though America's Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROC remained in place until 1979, the Nixon Administration's overtures to Beijing became known to the public in 1971. While the United States supported the membership of both the PRC and ROC in the United Nations, the Taiwan-based government was ousted from the international body in order that the communist government could represent all of China's interests to the global forum.

Pragmatic power politics shaped America's relationship with Taiwan throughout the course of the Cold War, yet the bond between Taipei and Washington could not be broken by the abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty or diplomatic de-recognition of the ROC. Formation of diplomatically downgraded, but functionally equivalent, agencies rapidly replaced the American Embassy and its security assistance organizations such that state-to-state level dialogue could continue under the guise of non-governmental organizations from 1979 on. When the Executive Branch championed defense cooperation with China as the appropriate means to contain Soviet aggression in the mid-1970s, the U.S. Congress took action to ensure that America's long-standing relationship with the ROC would not be discarded. Given that the main focus of the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979<sup>79</sup> was to ensure the stability of the region and enhance the security of the

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119.

<sup>78</sup> "The Lyndon B. Johnson National Security Files, Introduction: 1963-1969." *University Publications of America* (Bethesda, MD), 1995; [On-line] available from: [http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic/guides/area\\_studies/nsf/nsflbj2.asp](http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic/guides/area_studies/nsf/nsflbj2.asp); Internet; accessed 11 Feb 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Taiwan Relations Act, *United States Code Title 22 Chapter 48 Sections 3301-3316* (10 April 1979); [On-line] available from: <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/tra01.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 Feb 2005.



ROC regime, it is little wonder that the past quarter century has seen significant military engagement efforts between the United States and Taiwan even in the shadow of improving relations with the PRC.

Throughout the 1980s, in compliance with the Joint Sino-American Communiqué regarding the Taiwan question, the Reagan Administration sought to reduce arms sales to the ROC and succeeded in drawing down weapons sold under the Foreign Military Sales program from a 1984 peak of \$707 million to approximately \$620 million in 1987.<sup>80</sup> However, continued American domestic support for the ROC encouraged a strict interpretation of the TRA as overriding any commitments made in the 1982 Communiqué, so technology transfers under commercial sales programs were allowed to increase such that quantitative losses in weapons capabilities were minimized during this period. This ambiguous defense policy towards Taiwan would continue throughout the remainder of the Cold War in an attempt to hold true to historical obligations to the ROC while encouraging the PRC to lean toward the United States in its foreign policy and perpetuate China's alienation from the Soviet Union. While U.S. quasi-diplomatic, expansive economic and ambiguous military engagement programs with the ROC were not the only point of contention between Washington and Beijing, they contributed significantly to the PRC decision to follow an "independent foreign policy" during the 1980s. This decision to follow its own course independent of either superpower's lead came in concert with the PRC's stated policy shift toward peaceful reunification with Taiwan through the "one country, two systems" initiative.<sup>81</sup> While direct military-to-military exchanges with the ROC declined after de-recognition and abrogation of the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty, links between the American and Taiwanese defense communities remained unbroken throughout the 1980s and have grown steadily into a quiet, but robust cooperative relationship during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>80</sup> A. James Gregor, *Arming the Dragon: U.S. Security Ties with the People's Republic of China* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 101.

<sup>81</sup> Chen Bojiang, "Changes in China's International Strategy and Goals for the New Millenium." *Georgetown University Institute for the Study of Diplomacy* (Washington, DC), 1998; [On-line Working Paper] available from: <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/bog01/>; Internet; accessed 13 Feb 2005.

## B. CONTEMPORARY U.S. MILITARY ENGAGEMENT WITH ROC

Contemporary American policy posture towards security cooperation with the ROC began with a controversial round of arms sales by the George H.W. Bush Administration to Taiwan in 1992. Whether in response to the PLAAF acquisition of Su-27 fighter aircraft from Russia or a desire to bolster the American defense industry, President Bush defended his decision to sell 150 F-16 fighter aircraft to the ROC as a means to "help maintain peace and stability" in East Asia.<sup>82</sup> While PRC officials lamented this sale as a direct contradiction to President Reagan's 1982 Communiqué promising not to increase weapons transfers to Taiwan in either qualitative or quantitative terms,<sup>83</sup> the aircraft transfer and prerequisite training proceeded on schedule and were completed in 2001. Over the course of the Clinton Administration, no single weapon sale would compare to this transaction, yet Taiwan would continue to be the one of the largest customers of American FMS programs for the remainder of the millennium.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, while equipment sales remained at relatively low levels between 1993 and 2000, non-hardware exchanges expanded significantly during the same period. This increase in number and frequency of military-to-military exchanges between the U.S. DoD and the ROC armed forces began after a 1994 Executive Branch policy review responded to reported shortfalls in Taiwan's ability to defend itself from a determined PLA attack.<sup>85</sup> Expansive functional-level talks with ROC forces sought to enhance Taiwan's state of military readiness and enable its armed forces to use weapons systems already in its possession to their full capacity. During this expansion, on-going Congressional debate regarding White House Taiwan policy highlighted the lack of weapon sales as a direct threat to the ROC's continued security and sought to overrule President Clinton's soft approach through legislation designed to clarify and enhance

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<sup>82</sup> U.S. White House Report, "President Bush and Defense Secretary Cheney both defended the Administration decision to sell 150 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan," 4 September 1992. [On-line] available from: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/taiwan/1992/920904-taiwan-usia2.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 Feb 2005.

<sup>83</sup> Joint Communiqué of the United States and the People's Republic of China, 18 August, 1982; [On-line] available from: <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communique03.htm>; Internet; accessed 17 Feb 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Shirley A. Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990," *Congressional Research Service* (30 October 2001), 7.; [On-line] available from: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/crs/RL30957.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Michael D. Swaine and James C. Mulvenon, *Taiwan's Foreign and Defense Policies: Features and Determinants* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 153.



American responsibilities under the Taiwan Relations Act.<sup>86</sup> Irrespective of these objections, a subsequent DoD review of these enhanced exchanges published in 2000 found that,

These initiatives provide an avenue to exchange views on Taiwan's requirements for defense modernization, to include professionalization and organizational issues, and training. Exchanges and discussions enhance our ability to assess Taiwan's longer term defense needs and develop well-founded security assistance policies. Such programs also enhance Taiwan's capacity for making operationally sound and cost effective acquisition decisions, and more importantly, to use its equipment more effectively for self-defense.<sup>87</sup>

These seemingly contradictory approaches to improving security and stability in the west Pacific region both provided substantial foundation for the George W. Bush Administration to develop an even more robust plan for improving military ties with the government on Taiwan. Beginning his term of office with unambiguous declarations of support for Taiwan and implied endorsement of independence, President George W. Bush upended decades of nuanced American diplomatic policy which balanced PRC sensitivities with historic U.S. commitment to ROC self-determination.<sup>88</sup> While rapid State Department damage control reestablished the long-term status quo with reasserted promises to adhere to the One China policy, the Bush Administration noticeably upgraded its military-to-military relations program with the ROC over the course of its first four years. Among the many tell-tale signs of a strengthening bond in defense cooperation is the transfer of security assistance duties at the de facto U.S. embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), from civilian contractors to active-duty military

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<sup>86</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Policy Committee, "Policy Chairman Hails Passage of Taiwan Security Enhancement Act; Cites Bipartisan, Veto-Proof Margin," 1 February 2000. [On-line] available from: [http://www.policy.house.gov/subcommittees/107/html/news\\_release.cfm.734.html](http://www.policy.house.gov/subcommittees/107/html/news_release.cfm.734.html); Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2005.

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Executive Summary of Report to Congress on Implementation of the Taiwan Relations Act," 18 December 2000. [On-line] available from: [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/twstrait\\_12182000.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/twstrait_12182000.html); Internet; accessed 15 Feb 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Kelly Wallace, "Bush Pledges Whatever It Takes To Defend Taiwan." *CNN*, 25 April 2001; [On-line] available from: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/04/24/bush.taiwan.abc/>; Internet; accessed 14 Feb 2005.

personnel.<sup>89</sup> While U.S. officials declare this change to be a simple administrative action designed to increase personnel efficiency, political leaders in the PRC see this move as a major policy reversal that favors ROC President Chen Shui-bian and his pro-independence platform. In addition to these programs to increase U.S.-ROC dialogue on improving military doctrine, strategy and operations being a substantial boon to Taiwan's military efficiency, Bush proposals for vastly increased weapons sales to the ROC had significant potential to counter what was perceived as a growing imbalance of military capabilities on either side of the Taiwan Straits. These proposals to sell Kidd-class destroyers, P-3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft, diesel submarines and the PAC-3 missile defense system have proven difficult to implement due to a broad range of issues ranging from ROC domestic politics and fiscal concerns to PRC protests against U.S. meddling. Furthermore, there is some concern in U.S. policy circles that the ROC is delaying the purchase of these systems in order to "free ride" on American overtures promising to defend the island from invasion.<sup>90</sup>

Although several of these purchases are proceeding piecemeal, the impact of this episode in U.S.-ROC defense cooperation is yet to be determined. Negative feelings between American and Taiwanese government officials over accusations and counter-accusations may translate into reduced cooperation as the Bush Administration proceeds into its next term of office; however, this does not seem likely. The dramatic turnovers in the American Executive branch's leadership positions will likely reinforce the importance of maintaining good relations with both the PRC and ROC in the coming years. Balancing the importance of economic development of the mainland with political liberalization on Taiwan will be a dynamic process within the higher levels of government, yet maintenance of the status quo is still the most stable policy for American interaction in the west Pacific.

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<sup>89</sup> "US to Post Military Officers to Taiwan Mission: Jane's" *Agence France Presse* (19 December 2004); [On-line] available from: <http://taiwansecurity.org/AFP/2004/AFP-191204.htm>; Internet; accessed 14 Feb 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Denny Roy, "U.S.-Taiwan Arms Sales: The Perils of Doing Business With Friends," *Asia-Pacific Security Studies Series* 3 (3 April 2004), [e-journal] <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/APSSS/Roy-TawainArms.pdf>; accessed 21 Feb 2005.



### C. U.S. INFLUENCE ON ROC MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

Since the earliest days of official American relations with the Nationalist government of China, the United States government has attempted to influence the capability, efficiency and professionalism of ROC military forces. Military-to-military relations during the Japanese invasion were primarily focused upon bolstering the ROC armed forces through massive equipment transfers and economic aid provided with very few strings attached. Providing Chiang Kai-shek's military regime a free hand in the distribution of these resources merely perpetuated the corrupt and inefficient management of his armed forces and virtually ensured that Mao's army would defeat them once the civil war resumed following the Japanese occupation. As the ROC's continued survival after its transfer to the island of Taiwan was primarily contingent on good relations with the United States, Chiang's military dictatorship opened its territory to a long term deployment of American military liaisons, training missions and operational units. From 1954 until de-recognition in 1979, the United States provided military assistance and operational capabilities to the ROC under the auspices of the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty. In addition to the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) that was established in 1951, large numbers of American military personnel were deployed to Taiwan in order to provide a credible defense against PLA forces from the mainland.<sup>91</sup> Build-up of American naval and air forces on and around the island of Formosa throughout the 1950s not only insured against PRC attack, but provided the United States with sufficient leverage with the Chiang regime to force political and structural changes on his governing institutions and various military organizations.

American-style military professionalism made its way into the developing ROC military from the bottom, through in-country training of soldiers and technicians, and from the top, through the influence of senior officers educated in the United States. One particular case study highlights best this top-down phenomenon. General Sun Li-jen, one of Nationalist China's most successful officers during the Japanese Occupation and a 1927 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), took charge of training ROC armies on Formosa in 1946 and became commander-in-chief of the Nationalist Army in

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<sup>91</sup> George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 406.; [On-line] available from: <http://www.formosa.org/~taiwanpg/kerr.pdf>; Internet; accessed 1 Mar 2005.



1950.<sup>92</sup> During his tenure, General Sun brought to bear many of the lessons he learned from his formal military education and his many combined operations under General Stillwell in the China-Burma-India theater of operations. Known as the “Ever Victorious General”, this central figure shaped the ROC’s nascent defense forces in many ways to conform to American expectations and the standards of behavior that would ensure a successful combined defense of the island throughout the Cold War. General Sun’s impact upon the security apparatus of the ROC is uncontested and the effects of his term in office would be felt by his nation’s military even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Officer candidates from the ROC attend centers of military education, such as VMI and The Citadel still today and add their American experiences to the collective body of knowledge that will form Taiwanese defense policies in the decades to come.<sup>93</sup>

Even accounting for the extended retrenchment of U.S.-ROC military relations from 1979 through the end of the Cold War, the substantial material, financial and experiential support provided to the Taiwanese defense establishment over the past sixty years created a bond that has developed into a feeling of mutual reliance and responsibility for stability of the security environment in the Taiwan Straits. Through the ebb and flow of American engagement with the ROC over the course of the past six decades, Taiwan has remained an important partner in promoting U.S. interests in East Asia. The continuation of educational exchanges, defensive equipment sales and functional-level dialogue will promote positive communications between American and ROC military leaders for the foreseeable future.

Throughout the Cold War, American military engagement with the Republic of China on Taiwan provided U.S. policy-makers significant opportunities to shape the political environment of East Asia in order to combat communist global aspirations. During the past decade, this relationship paid significant additional dividends in shaping the political liberalization of the ROC government and influenced the evolution of democratic institutions present on the island today. Maintaining these links in spite of

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<sup>92</sup> “End of a Career,” *Time Magazine* (29 August 1955); [On-line] available from: <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,823882,00.html>; Internet; accessed 1 Mar 2005.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy Steinbach, “Education Report-Foreign Student Series #20: Military Colleges,” *Voice of America* (13 January 2005); [On-line] available from: <http://www.unsv.com/intl/zchn/voanews/specialenglish/archives/spec200501130041/>; Internet; accessed 3 Mar 2005.

drastic shifts in American policy, such as rapprochement with the PRC and de-recognition of the ROC, has also demonstrated to the ROC's regional neighbors that the United States remained concerned with the stability and security of Asia as a whole.

Corollary relationships with other Asian polities did not always meet with the same levels of success as the U.S.-ROC engagement program.<sup>94</sup> However, another positive example of American military aid acting as a positive influence upon the domestic political evolution and economic development of its regional partners can be found within the special relationship the United States has had with the Kingdom of Thailand during the same period. While American Cold War interactions with both of these case study governments supported regimes that suppressed public freedoms and democratic movements when these concerns were secondary to the threat of global communism, these lengthy and sustained relationships laid the foundation for the transitions to democracy we have seen in recent years. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of establishing and maintaining persistent links with the military forces of the PRC in order that we may encourage similar developments within that nation as well. While the differences in size, ideology and contrary positions of national interests make the proposition of treating the PLA like its ROC and Thai counterparts seem counterfactual, the lessons learned from these relationships can help guide future American policy-makers in their efforts to manage U.S.-PRC relations as a whole.

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<sup>94</sup> American engagement with the Republic of South Vietnam was unable to support the unstable regime in spite of vast fiscal resources and long-term presence of large numbers of U.S. military advisors.

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#### IV. U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH THAILAND

Civil-Military relations in Kingdom of Thailand during the modern era represent an excellent case study for discussing the significant impact military forces bent on democratic reformation can have on the development of a national political consciousness. The lessons learned from Thailand's political evolution and America's special relationship with the military forces of that nation has obvious significance for other U.S. relations in Asia, including with the PRC and Taiwan. During the course of the past three-quarters of a century, Thailand has transformed its governing structures from that of an absolute monarchy, through various stages of authoritarian military rule and dysfunctional parliamentary democracy. Over these many years, the Royal Thai Army (RTA) has developed a national self-image as the protector of democracy and has legitimized violent coups on the basis of moral and political authority stemming from sources above and outside the standing government. Whether justly responding to systemic corruption and nepotism in the governing bureaucracy or simply advocating one cabal's parochial interests over another, this seemingly endless string of usurpations of power by the military has plagued the Thai polity's attempts at true representative democracy. While the earliest of these juntas professed egalitarian ideals and democratic principles, combinations of legitimate threats to state security and personal desires of military strongmen to perpetuate autocratic rule led to the repression of free elections and rule of law for over four decades following the fall of the absolute monarchy.

The Thai military's long history of professionalism, political activism, and modernization based on Western organizational principles laid a solid foundation for its most recent transformation into a responsible actor within the parameters of the state and the confines of the rule of law. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various external forces have influenced the size, composition and roles of the RTA both as an instrument of national security and the primary power behind the policy making apparatus of the Thai state. During the latter half of this past century, the United States has been one of the most significant outside actors pushing the Thai military further down the path toward acceptance of a more apolitical role for itself in domestic governance and a stricter interpretation of its roles and responsibilities with respect to the people of Thailand.

While modern U.S. support for Thailand began with the anti-Japanese underground during World War II<sup>95</sup>, American aid for the Thai military greatly expanded in 1950 through a variety of agreements including grants and weapons procurement credits.<sup>96</sup> Even though this extensive relationship encountered difficulty following the cessation of U.S. military operations in Vietnam, a significant number of mutually beneficial modernization and security building programs continued to strengthen the bond between the two nations. A number of education and training programs, exchange officer projects, weapon system sales and large-scale exercises continue to show the Thai domestic polity and various regional political players that the United States highly values its special relationship with the Kingdom of Thailand.

While American defense relations with Thailand achieved the primary desired effects of institutionalizing of military professionalism, promoting the U.S.-held beliefs concerning the subjugation of military forces under the control of a civilian government met with significant resistance. Throughout America's Cold War interaction with the Kingdom of Thailand, support for anti-communist policies took precedence over the promotion of democratic values within the Thai military leadership. During this period, many very capable senior-ranking officers used their technical proficiency and charismatic strength of will to derail the formation of liberal democratic institutions, subdue popular demands for reform and divert national political power from elected officials to appointed bureaucrats and uniformed personnel.<sup>97</sup> However, the end of the Cold War removed the primary threat to state internal security and downgraded the Thai military's status as sole provider of moral leadership and social stability. This loss of mandate became apparent in the public response to the military coup of 1991.

Following the antiquated paradigm of responding to domestic public dissent against military-government dictates, on 18 May 1992, RTA forces engaged

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<sup>95</sup> *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. "Thailand-History-Pibul and Pridi," [On-Line] (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004); available from <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0861512.html>; Internet; accessed 7 Dec 2004.

<sup>96</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "Thailand-Defense-Foreign Security Assistance," *GlobalSecurity.org* [On-Line]; available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/thailand/assistance.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 Dec 2004.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 128.



demonstrators with lethal force, killing 44 student protesters and wounding 38 others.<sup>98</sup> Reflecting post-Cold War globalization trends and recognizing international pressures to depart from draconian governing tools, King Bhumibol publicly ordered the military to desist in its heavy-handed tactics, deal with the protestors peacefully and negotiate on an equal footing. This crisis began the long, and as yet incomplete, process of removing the Thai armed forces from its central role in government and curtailing senior officers' involvement in national policy formation to those areas where their technical expertise directly applies.<sup>99</sup> While this transition from activist policy-maker to subservient tool for state security and economic development will continue in the coming decades due to internal guidance from the monarch, direction by the civilian bureaucracy and in response to popular demands, the Thai military's ability to respond has been shaped by its relationship with the United States. Even though broad-ranging and long-term military-to-military relations between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand failed to secure civilian dominance over the use of military force, the technical proficiency and professionalism imbued into the Thai armed forces through this relationship greatly facilitated the kingdom's ability to liberalize once the decision to reform had been made.

#### A. HISTORY OF THAI CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Under the absolute monarchy of the Chakri Dynasty, traditional practices developed prior to Siam's exposure to the Western powers shaped the relationship between its governing bureaucracy and its military forces. Palace appointments to high military command often flowed along royal bloodlines and passed among those deemed most politically reliable by the monarch and his closest advisors. Given these close political links, the practice of incorporating military leaders into the decision-making process of the central government was a natural outgrowth of the organization and structure of the royal military forces. Recognizing the dangers to his kingdom's national sovereignty and territorial integrity posed by encroaching Western colonial powers, King Mongkut (reigned 1851-68) began a series of governmental reforms, including military

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<sup>98</sup> James Ockney. "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 188.

<sup>99</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk. "Thailand: Military Professionalism at the Crossroads," in *Military Professionalism in Asia: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Honolulu: East West Center, 2001), 80.

reorganization, based on European structural models.<sup>100</sup> King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), Mongkut's eldest son and successor, continued his father's reform efforts by expanding the scope of his country's modernization (and Westernization) throughout the social, economic and military spheres. Systematic reform of the armed forces throughout this period resulted in the formation of a standing army and navy, as well as, a highly complex and well-organized bureaucracy with which to manage it. However, in the process of inculcating the professional skills and organizational constructs of Western militaries, Siamese officer corps learned a great deal about the social and political benefits of Europe's comparatively more liberal systems of government.<sup>101</sup> Thus, when Chulalongkorn's son, Vajiravudh (1910-25), proved less capable than his father at managing the affairs of the nation, the military's high level of education, training and sense of responsibility to the nation resulted in a military coup attempt on November 11, 1911.<sup>102</sup> The young officers that perpetrated this rebellion envisioned an end to the ineffective rule of the absolute monarch and the beginning of an era of republican rule similar to those Western models they had been exposed to during their education and training. While this first break between the military and the monarchy failed to achieve its goal, it provided ample precedent for the successful revolt of 1932. Staged in the midst of the economic hardship of the Great Depression, a coalition of mid-level military officers and civilian bureaucrats joined together to force the King to abdicate his position as absolute monarch in favor of a constitutional government. However, given the unstable nature of this fledgling democracy, military rule would continue, in cooperation with the existing civilian bureaucracy and with support from the United States government, under the guise of a parliamentary system for decades to come.

The first major turning point for Thai civil-military relations occurred in 1973 as a confluence of popular demonstrations against the military-appointed government and a

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<sup>100</sup> Chris Jones, "The First Asian Tiger: Siam in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Heliograph* [On-Line]; available from <http://www.heliograph.com/trmgs/trmgs4/siam1.shtml>; Internet; accessed 7 Dec 2004.

<sup>101</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "Thailand-Intro-Military History," *GlobalSecurity.org* [On-Line]; available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/thailand/mil-history.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 Dec 2004.

<sup>102</sup> Wikipedia, "Vajiravudh," *Wikipedia* [On-Line]; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vajiravudh>; accessed 6 Dec 2004.

power play by a so-called “soft-liner”, RTA Commander-in-Chief General Krit Sivara.<sup>103</sup> Backed by pro-democracy forces among the nation’s political and economic elites, including King Bhumibol, the recently appointed Commander-in-Chief withheld his support from the sitting Prime Minister, General Thanom, and Deputy Prime Minister, General Praphat, at a critical juncture. Disregarding their orders to suppress crowds of students demonstrating for free elections and against the authoritarian military regime, General Krit humiliated the leaders of the junta, forced them from office and allowed the appointment of liberal leadership and rapid reform of the autocratic government bureaucracy. This type of factionalism within the military was commonplace throughout the modern era of Thailand’s political development and often shaped the character of one military coup with respect to another. However, in this instance, unlike the takeovers of the past, the leading military figure supported the popular cries for liberal democracy led by civilian authorities. Even though the appointed civilian government was able to hold national assembly elections in 1975, factionalism within the majority political party, disgruntled economic elites and military machinations forestalled the consolidation of democracy and reinstituted government guided by military junta in 1976.<sup>104</sup>

Economic growth and expanding social opportunity allowed Thailand’s “semi-democracy” to prosper throughout the 1980s under the guidance of an elected parliamentary government that, while outwardly civilian led, was under the firm control of the military bureaucracy. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the concurrent reduction in threat to national security from communist insurgency, many liberal thinkers and business elites began to outwardly question the legitimacy of Thailand’s authoritarian government. Therefore, in February 1991, General Suchinda Kraprayoon usurped power from the sitting government and reversed Thailand’s progress toward liberal governance by implementing an authoritarian constitution and manipulating the March 1992 elections to ensure his continued control. Pro-democracy groups once again took to the streets in protest. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1992, following three days of confrontations between student protestors and military forces, King Bhumibol

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<sup>103</sup> William Case, *Politics in Southeast Asia: Democracy or Less* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 171.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 173.

intervened to stop the bloodshed and restore peace and stability to his country.<sup>105</sup> In an unprecedented televised royal audience, the King held both parties equally culpable for the tragic events of Black May, forced General Suchinda to relinquish his position as Prime Minister and called for new elections, which were held in September of 1992. This overt revocation of palace support for military governance, compounded by globalization trends and international pressure against such autocratic methods of rule began what has become over a decade of steady democratization and decline in military intervention in politics.

#### B. U.S. MILITARY ENGAGEMENT WITH THAILAND

The rocky beginnings for U.S. relations with Thailand in the first years following WWII should come as no surprise given the Thai domestic political environment and American global priorities during this period of reconstruction. In late 1944, with the collapse of Japan's ability to resist Allied advances in the Pacific imminent, the pro-Axis government of Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram could no longer resist the political and insurgent pressures of the Free Thai movement, led by his once close friend Pridi Phanomyong.<sup>106</sup> Due to their wartime history as a recipient of U.S. and British support against Japanese forces occupying Thailand, Pridi and other Free Thai leaders were able to assuage the Allies' anger over the Phibun government's declaration of war once they rose to positions of power within the government. However, America's primary concern during 1944-45 was not the stability of a fledgling Thai democracy, but the economic and political restoration of Western Europe. Recurring requests from Prime Minister Pridi and Thai military leaders loyal to him for American military aid were delayed or disregarded by officials in Washington. This lack of overt support for the pro-democracy Pridi regime greatly contributed to the unstable political environment that allowed Phibun to return to power following a coup staged by army officers loyal to him on 9 November 1947. Even though U.S. State Department officials recommended strong measures designed to overturn the pro-Phibun junta in order to promote a more moderate government, a series of concurrent advances by communist insurgents and political groups in Malaya, Burma,

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<sup>105</sup> Dan King. "Thailand," in *Democracy, Governance and Economic Performance: East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Ian Marsh, Jean Blondel and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: United Nations University Press, 1999), 206.

<sup>106</sup> Fineman, 17.



India and Vietnam required that the United States support a strong, anti-communist authoritarian over weaker, pro-democracy alternatives. To many U.S. policy-makers, Phibun and his ability to command the loyalty of the RTA seemed to be the only means to ensure that Thailand maintained its pro-America stance during a period of heightened communist popularity.

Thus, as Phibun's political allies worked to redefine American views of his pro-Japan policies and improve Western perspectives with regard to his potential as a strong, but moderating force within the Thai polity, elements of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy began to reconsider their stance against providing military aid to the once and future dictator of Thailand. However, as of early 1949, the corrupt and ineffective utilization of American military aid by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese in the defense of mainland China against Mao Tse-tung's Communist forces convinced Secretary of State Dean Acheson that the unstable government in Bangkok would similarly squander these extremely limited resources.<sup>107</sup> These State Department upper-echelon concerns were reversed later that same year under pressures from the United States Congress and public criticism demanding that something be done to stem the tide of communism that had overcome China and threatened the entire East and Southeast Asian landmass. With Acheson firmly behind a policy of providing military aid to anti-communist governments in Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Phibun began to increase his anti-communist rhetoric specifically to gain American favor and ensure access to the advanced weapons, training and logistic support he desperately needed to curry the favor of his RTA supporters. Economic and technical aid began to flow from the United States to Thailand during the summer of 1950 in a what amounted to a blatant quid pro quo for Thailand's diplomatic recognition of the American-supported Bao Dai government of Vietnam and Phibun's dispatch of Thai military forces in support of the United Nations mission to defend South Korea from the communist invasion. This firm and overt selection of the anti-communist camp, as well as various public denunciations of Mao's newly established government, thrust the Thai government from its normally flexible foreign policy position to one of rigid semi-alliance with America and its Western capitalist clique. Wholeheartedly following the U.S. lead on a wide range of economic

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<sup>107</sup> Fineman, 87.

and security policies did not engender strong support for Prime Minister Phibun among the liberal and staunchly nationalist interest groups within Thailand, but his ability to control the RTA and arm it with American-made weapons allowed the authoritarian government to suppress those dissenting voices.

While Phibun's dependence on American military aid drove his government to endorse and implement policies that were often unpopular among the Thai domestic constituency, U.S. dependence on Thailand as the core of its foreign policy in Southeast Asia required acceptance of the military dictatorship's undemocratic principles. This interdependence and America's growing anti-communist activism in Southeast Asia both allowed and encouraged Thailand's military rulers to suppress liberal dissent within their borders regardless of its ties to organized communist efforts to undermine the government. Furthermore, the parallel goals of American and Phibun anti-communist policies made collaboration in covert counter-insurgency training and clandestine support for Thailand-based Chinese Nationalist Party rebels effective programs for further intertwining the two nations in a semi-alliance of broad ranging implications. A symbolic turning point in this relationship followed in September 1954 with the signing of the Manila Pact and the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) which, while indicating mutual support of the member nations, fell far short of the inclusive collective security assurances of its North Atlantic counterpart. Throughout the early 1950s, the various programs of military assistance and security cooperation between Thailand and the United States served the practical needs of the patron for a stable anti-communist base in Southeast Asia and solidified the power of a military government that grew more authoritarian and corrupt with each passing year. Because of the growing unpopularity of America's exploitation of Thailand to implement its foreign policy against the various communist movements throughout Southeast Asia, U.S. policy makers had no choice other than to continue support for the repressive government of Phibun and his junta.

Over the course of the next twenty years, various domestic political struggles between military factions created a continuous cycle of liberalization and retrenchment by the ruling government in order to manipulate popular sentiment and gain support for specific policy initiatives. During this period, however, the United States government

found itself opposed to Thai efforts to expand democratic rule due to the strength of anti-American sentiments, incessant factionalism among social groups and weak resistance to communist efforts to undermine the pro-Western government. Realpolitik concerns for expanding U.S. influence throughout Southeast Asia made military cooperation with Thailand a poor tool for encouraging democracy or bringing liberal governance to that nation's rank-and-file citizenry. However, along with the effect of increasing the Thai government's internal security apparatus through arms and training, American aid provided significant infrastructure and economic opportunities to underdeveloped regions of the country.<sup>108</sup>

Running in concert with a shift in the RTA's counter-insurgency strategy, from pure oppression to military-led rural development, U.S. military construction provided a vehicle for improving the economic well-being of the disenfranchised masses. In addition to roads and facilities built for strategic purposes, the RTA engaged in construction and education programs designed to improve the social welfare and political reliability of thousands of communities in rural areas most vulnerable to communist insurgency and propaganda. This extensive national development program laid the foundation for increased participation of the populace in the nation's political processes and, after the 1973 civilian uprising forced the Thanom military regime from power, the central government began to actively promote citizens' right to join political parties and activist organizations. While the military once again asserted its dominance over the Thai political system in 1976, the junta that came to power in 1977 was of a significantly more liberal ilk than its predecessors.<sup>109</sup> Whereas in the past the central government saw an opening up of the democratic process as weakening the state against the communist threat, this new era of leadership focused on the nation-building effects of empowering its citizenry with a voice in the governance of the country. Finally recognizing that broad-ranging repression of dissent was counter-productive to the overall counter-insurgency effort, the military-led government focused even greater resources on national economic development and political liberalization during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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<sup>108</sup> Robert Muscat, *Thailand and the United States: Development, Security and Foreign Aid* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>109</sup> Surachart, 78.

Throughout this period leading up to the Thai government's declaration of victory over the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in 1983, American financial aid and military support provided the economic resources and regime stability necessary for the continuation of this democratization process. While the elimination of the CPT threat strengthened the nation overall, this victory removed one of the primary factors legitimizing the military's leadership role in the government. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War further reduced the ability of the military to justify its central role in the parliamentary government and allowed the civilian bureaucracy to peacefully take over many primary positions of authority. By the late 1980s the democratic process in Thailand had become institutionalized, yet some within the military maintained an agenda of dictatorial rule regardless of the social and political forces at work, both at home and throughout the post-Cold War international community. Lacking the political backing of the United States, the 1991 military coup led by General Suchinda was unable to consolidate its control and was forced from office by popular dissent reinforced by royal decree in May of the following year.

Like its support for many developing nations during the Cold War, the United States military program of aid to the Thai government from the early 1950s through the 1970s was focused primarily on the stability of its anti-communist regime. Fully understanding the repressive nature of the Thai military dictatorships of this period, the U.S. government chose to support the repression of democratic institutions in the face of an overwhelming threat from the expansion of Soviet influence throughout Asia. As the threat of global communist revolution subsided, the lengthy and extensive military-to-military relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand proved to be a foundation for economic development, the creation of a Thai middle class and the stable growth of democratic institutions during the 1990s through the present.

However, while consolidation of Thai democracy continues under the recently reelected coalition government headed by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, policy pundits in the United States fear that unfettered support for the incumbent regime will encourage the growth of authoritarianism in Thailand for the near future. As was the case during the Cold War, the U.S. government has a myriad of concerns in Asia that may relegate the expansion of democracy to a secondary priority. As Washington hopes to



maintain a strong ally in its prosecution of terrorist groups in Southeast Asia and a bulwark against the potential for PRC expansion in the region, American policy-makers may find that pragmatism prevails once again. When the threat was insurgents backed by the world communist revolution, Washington turned a blind eye to the repression of civil liberties in the name of maintaining stability and a pro-Western regime in power. Now, the threat of Jihadist insurgents undermining regional security may drive a similar attitude in the White House and among members of Congress. The recent elevation of Thailand to a status of 'Major Non-NATO Ally' provides the Thai government access to a significant range of fiscal and military materiel resources with which they may develop more robust counter-terror capabilities.<sup>110</sup> Yet, as in the 1960s and 1970s, this same material and financial support can easily be converted into a capability to maintain political control of the Thai polity through force. Continuing American efforts to improve the Thai armed forces' combat effectiveness, organizational efficiency and military professionalism has significant implications for Thai domestic politics and U.S. foreign policy throughout East and Southeast Asia in the coming decade.

#### C. U.S. INFLUENCE ON THAI MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

In addition to extensive political and financial support, the U.S. government provided significant numbers of military advisors, influenced Thai educational programs and allowed the Thai military access to advanced training that would shape the perspectives of a broad range of policy-makers in the Royal Thai Government throughout the past half century. Programs designed to expose Thai civilian bureaucrats to U.S. methods of governance and administration were begun by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) as early as 1951.<sup>111</sup> The long term impact of this education aid program on the formation and administration of the Thai government is readily apparent from the number of senior leaders that hold degrees from American institutions and the number of Thai military officers with U.S. military education. A review of the military officers alone reveals that over 200 individuals received undergraduate education from U.S. service academies or private military schools. As of

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<sup>110</sup> "Fact Sheet: Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) Status for Thailand," *U.S. Embassy in Thailand* (12 February 2004). [On-line] available from: <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/apec2003/factsheetmnna.htm>; Internet; accessed 12 Mar 2005.

<sup>111</sup> Muscat, 50.

early 2004, there were forty Thai General Officers and forty-five Colonels possessing academic degrees from American military universities.<sup>112</sup> Throughout their careers, these senior officers have applied the lessons learned from their various interactions with American counterparts to their decision making processes. While not all decisions made by these senior officials were directly consonant with U.S. interests, the foundational experiences provided by an American military education improves the ability of Thai officers to understand and predict Washington's response to a given policy shift or directive. The attendant reduction in miscommunication and common backgrounds between senior leaders in both nations' armed forces that these shared experiences provide often facilitates meaningful discussion on points that would otherwise be extremely contentious.

In addition to educational opportunities, large scale combined arms exercises build common operating procedures, improve combat efficiency and promote bonds of camaraderie between American and Thai military personnel. Aside from the inherent benefits to Thai doctrine and tactics development, the recurring shared experiences between large numbers of U.S. and Thai troops build a sense of common purpose and mutual identification of their opposite number as a cooperative partner. Exercise COBRA GOLD represents the most salient example of cooperative exercises between American and Asian armed forces. Conducted continuously since 1982, COBRA GOLD provides an opportunity for each of the branches of service in both nations' militaries to learn tactics, technique and procedures from one another, while also affording American troops the chance for exposure to Thailand's rich culture and environment.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, this large scale exercise may form the core of future multinational security cooperation

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<sup>112</sup> The Thai Joint Staff Office provided a listing of Thai officers with American military education by institution, graduation year and included present rank of each individual spanning from 1957 until 2003. An overwhelming majority of these officers graduated from the private institutions (VMI-62, Norwich Academy-55, and The Citadel-55) while the Service Academies (USNA-8, USMA-12, USAFA-13) produced only a small fraction of the whole. Col Thawip Netniyom to Capt Michael Bolen, "Information on Thai West Point Grads," [email] January 18, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> "History of Exercise COBRA GOLD," *Asia-Pacific Area Network* (26 May 2004); [On-line] available from: <http://www.apan-info.net/cobragold/history.asp>; Internet; accessed 3 Mar 2005.



initiatives. Already, COBRA GOLD 2004 included participants from Singapore and Mongolia as well as observers from Australia, India, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and China.<sup>114</sup>

Military-to-military relationships between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand during the 1950s and 1960s proved to be a foundation for long-term economic development, the creation of a Thai middle class and the stable growth of democratic institutions during the 1990s through the present. Continuing educational exchanges and large-scale exercises promote common understanding and experiential bonds between the armed forces of both nations as they progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An American program of long-term engagement with the Thai military, continued through periods of political upheaval and digressing foreign policy goals, has begun to pay huge dividends for both governments and their constituencies. Among these is the realization of an American goal to see democratic institutions flourish in Southeast Asia.

#### 1. Thai Civil-Military Relations during the Democratic Era

Following the 1992 restoration of civilian leadership within the Thai central government, that nation's military forces have shown restraint and deference to civil authority with regard to a wide range of legislative actions that significantly reduced the scope of the RTA's responsibilities. Among these were revisions to the Government Administration in a Crisis Act of 1952 and the Martial Law Act of 1954, as well as the elimination of the Internal Security Act of 1976.<sup>115</sup> Not only did the military leadership allow this whittling away of its domestic authority, but it remain reticent as the civilian bureaucracy dismantled the Capital Peacekeeping Command, its primary institution for implementing internal security measures during times of crisis in Bangkok. Furthermore, this political retrenchment exhibited itself in official doctrine and has been espoused publicly by military leaders at the highest levels. Recognizing the end of the autocratic era after the Bloody May incident in 1992, Air Chief Marshal Voranat Apicharee, supreme commander of Thai military forces stated simply, "Professional soldiers do not

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<sup>114</sup> "Multinational Observers Study COBRA GOLD's Combined Ethos," *Asia-Pacific Area Network* (23 May 2004); [On-line] available from: <http://www.apan-info.net/cobragold/fullstory.asp?id=46>; Internet; accessed 3 Mar 2005.

<sup>115</sup> Surachart, 80.

stage coups.”<sup>116</sup> This archetypical example of the transformation of the military’s self-defined role in politics remained a truism for the decade that followed and promises to hold true for many years to come.

While the military’s role in government has been significantly altered by domestic events and external influences, its national development and defense missions have endured and even expanded in the post-Cold War era. The technical proficiency and growing apolitical professionalism of the RTA and its maritime and air service counterparts have allowed the Thai military institution to remain a pillar of strength upon which the national bureaucracy can rely. While military officers have lost the legitimate right to directly govern the nation, the defense establishment as a whole has become synonymous with public welfare and national security. A continuation of the highly successful rural development programs of the 1970s and 80s has provided ample opportunity for the Thai military to demonstrate its ability to act responsibly for the good of the public and further remove itself from the stigma of its past transgressions. While the general populace maintains their past view of the military as a righteous defender of the state, it no longer recognizes that institution as having either a higher authority to govern or a greater ability to bring peace and internal security to the nation than a democratically elected civilian government.

Over the course of the past half century, the extensive military-to-military relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand has been the foundation for a broad sweeping alliance that brought economic prosperity and national development to the Thai people. While various periods of internal security crisis and political upheaval created an environment unfavorable for the promotion of democracy within the Thai polity, the constant interplay between the defense establishments of these two nations laid the ground work for communication and cooperation well outside the strict bounds of physical security policy or force modernization. By encouraging the adaptation of Western organizational structures within the military and civilian government bureaucracies, American defense officials created points of commonality that paid great dividends toward bringing Thailand into synchronization with U.S. foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, continuing combined large-scale defense exercises will

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<sup>116</sup> Surachart, 77.



maintain interoperability between U.S. and Thai command and control systems, reinforce common procedures for joint combat operations and encourage high standards of excellence for officer corps performance. These and many other intangible benefits of military-to-military relations with the Thai defense establishment more than justify the effort and expense of continuing U.S. engagement policies with this most important Southeast Asian ally. In the years to come, Thailand will grow into its role as a regional model for economic prosperity and democratic political evolution. By supporting the various Thai regimes of the past half century and encouraging that nation's transition toward liberal governing structures and an apolitical military force, the United States government has enabled the Kingdom of Thailand to become a stable and responsible member of the global community.

Over the course of the past sixty years, the governments of the Kingdom of Thailand and the United States have cooperated across a broad spectrum of developmental programs, foreign policy initiatives and efforts to maintain stability and security throughout Southeast Asia. The rapport between both nations' armed services has also endured in spite of vacillating American policy platforms, political upheaval within the Thai government and negative popular opinion concerning the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. By maintaining this special relationship through good times and bad, each side has created an environment conducive to enhancing the mutual interests long into the future. This model can well address the problem of improving U.S.-PRC relations by recognizing that each side's parochial interests can best be served through cooperation across the full gamut of security, economic and political arenas. Just as anti-communist counter-insurgency cooperation between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand brought together their two governments during the Cold War, so too could the common threat of global terrorism serve to intertwine the interests of Washington and Beijing. Recognizing the many interests shared by the U.S. and PRC polities is an important step in the confidence and trust-building processes that are necessary for maintaining security and stability in the Asia-Pacific theater in the coming decades. However, combined U.S.-PRC efforts to thwart terrorist operations only address a single area of common interest. Just as contemporary U.S.-Thai military exchanges and training initiatives demonstrate that cooperation during crises can lead to peacetime collaboration,

so too should increased U.S.-PRC combined counter-terror operations, counter-drug programs and confidence building efforts improve Sino-American relations in many subsequent areas.

## V. CONCLUSION

The People's Republic of China is a rising power in Asia with significant and growing influence in the global market economy. Fueled by extremely high rates of GDP expansion, the PRC military has achieved a high state of professionalism compared to the abysmal state of readiness exhibited by the PLA prior to Deng Xiaoping's reform efforts of the late 1970s. By continuing to treat the PRC as a Cold War adversary, implementing policies to contain its peaceful rise and attempting to isolate the nation from opportunities to improve the social welfare of its citizenry, the United States will create the political-military crisis it seeks to avoid. Through a deepened, systemic military-to-military relations program, the U.S. government can dispel the distrust and suspicion of the past century that existed between itself and the hard-line CCP government of the 1950s and 1960s and build an interdependent link that will reduce tensions and improve both nations' ability to achieve safety and security for their respective constituencies. Without these active measures, the PRC will continue to expand its influence over neighboring nations and build a power bloc in opposition to U.S. objectives in East Asia. By creating complementary political objectives and enhancing collective security through military diplomacy, both the United States and China will attain higher levels of peace and prosperity than either nation, acting independently, could achieve.

The following policy prescriptions incorporate many of the lessons learned from American security cooperation with the Kingdom of Thailand and the Republic of China on Taiwan. By focusing on long-term, sustained military exchanges, training programs, combined operations and exercises, these recommendations attempt to highlight some of the more productive cooperative efforts that eventually strengthened government-to-government relationships outside of areas relating strictly to the defense sector. America's strong relationship with these two polities is no accident of history. The binding relationships between the United States and these two governments both grew out of intensive management of cooperative security programs, economic and infrastructure development aid and many years of dialogue to build trust. These relationships demonstrate what could be achieved through a diverse and pervasive military-to-military relations program with the People's Republic of China.

## A. POSSIBLE POLICY OPTIONS

### 1. Continue *Congagement* Policy

Bilateral relations between the United States and the PRC have long been a domestic political hot-potato for U.S. legislators and the executive branch of government. Cold War “containment” policies satisfied generations of Americans for whom China represented the final great enemy to conquer in order to rid the world of the scourge of communism, while liberal forces within the United States favored a more conciliatory stance. While many political pundits considered President Clinton’s “comprehensive engagement” program too mollifying in its posture, overlooking blatant risks to national security posed by Chinese espionage against U.S. nuclear capabilities and unchecked technology transfers from greedy industrial interests, the middle road policy of “conengagement” leaves much to be desired as well.<sup>117</sup> In the early days of President George W. Bush’s term of office, this policy included condemning China for its human rights violations, establishing the PRC as a “strategic competitor” through political rhetoric and belligerently confronting the CCP during the EP-3 crisis of 2001 implied an aggressive stance that leaned toward containment while sending mixed signals to both the American public and Chinese leadership.<sup>118</sup> Later, in order to ensure PRC support in the Global War on Terror, the Bush Administration softened its stance toward the PRC, supporting China’s economic growth and regional stability. A continuation of these policies will enable slow, stable cooperation on issues of grave importance to both sides while maintaining a hedge against China’s significant capability to project military force in the pursuit of hidden agendas and the CCP’s latent hegemonic disposition.

### 2. Initiate Unlimited Cooperation

Many American foreign policy analysts saw both great potential and extreme hazard in the type of extensive cooperation with China pursued by President Clinton during his terms of office. Allowing widespread access to a broad range of political,

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<sup>117</sup> RAND Corp., “Rand Analysts Urge Major Shift in U.S. China Policy,” RAND News Release, 10 Sep 1999. Available from <http://www.rand.org/news/Press.99/china.9.10.html>. Internet; accessed 01 Dec 2004.

<sup>118</sup> George W. Bush, “China and Russia -- Powers in Transition,” Speech presented Simi Valley, California, 19 Nov 1999. Available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0900/ijpe/pj52bush.htm>. Internet; accessed 26 Nov 2004.

industrial and technological resources unnerved many Americans and instilled citizens with an uneasy sense that U.S. interests were being sold out to kowtow to a rising economic power in Asia.<sup>119</sup> However, facilitating China's economic growth brought unprecedented anti-corruption efforts, fiscal transparency and social liberalization policies to the PRC domestic political landscape. These trends toward increased rule of law, growing tolerance for diverging political opinions and economic stability will provide the foundation for peaceful coexistence between the United States and PRC. Mutually beneficial expansion of commerce and cultural exchange will foster further convergence of national interests and minimize points of contention. However, full spectrum military relations, including sales of advanced weapon systems, comprehensive disclosure of U.S. doctrine and tactics, as well as frequent training missions to improve PLA effectiveness in combat would, no doubt build strong relationships between the military forces of China and the United States, but the risk involved in this level of engagement outweighs the benefits.

### 3. Broaden and Systematize Engagement Programs

Balancing a need for increased cooperation between the DoD and the PLA with a pragmatic realization that American and Chinese national interests do not, at present, completely coincide necessitates a moderate approach to improving U.S.-PRC military-to-military relations in the coming decade. By initiating educational exchange programs between the two nations' militaries, engaging in joint exercises of benign missions such as search and rescue and increasing the frequency of port visits and confidence building events, the U.S. government can walk the fine line between containment and engagement while promoting peaceful coexistence. By overcoming the Cold War predisposition to view China as the next obvious threat to peace and prosperity on Earth, the United States can avoid that self-fulfilling prophecy and help engender an amiable competition for scarce resources instead of violent conflict. Laying a foundation at the lowest levels of the officer corps, both in the U.S. military and the PLA, for mutual understanding and the elimination of preconceived xenophobic notions can yield a future cadre of leaders in the

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<sup>119</sup> Jeff Gerth, et al., "Evidence of China Plan to Buy Entrée into U.S. Technology," New York Times, 15 Dec 1998. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com/library/politics/121598donate.html>. Internet; accessed 28 Nov 2004.



defense establishment that can better comprehend the goals and objectives of their counterparts across the Pacific. Improvements in formal and informal communication pathways between the military institutions of the United States and China will also benefit both sides by reducing the likelihood of catastrophic misunderstanding during times of crises.

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts to improve military-to-military relations between the United States armed forces and the PLA must include multi-tiered, broad-scope, stable, long-term programs demonstrating a commitment to cooperation and consultation in areas of mutual concern to the individual and collective security of both nations. The multi-tiered character of this campaign will work to develop lasting relationships between personnel from the various counterpart branches of service (Air Force, Navy, Army) of junior, mid-grade and senior levels of their respective officer corps. Furthermore, the broad-scope nature of the following recommendations is reflected in the diversity of initiatives undertaken to expand and deepen our mutual understanding of counterpart motivations, intentions and decision-making processes. A wide spectrum of exercises, high-level visits, personnel exchanges, education programs, and combined operations will expose common goals and interests shared by each nation and reveal opportunities for future cooperation instead of avenues for conflict. Finally, past efforts to promote constructive interaction between the military forces of the PRC and United States have had neither consistency nor a record of cooperation upon which these two nations could build future successes in economic and political relations. Until each of the above criteria is met, the pan-Pacific security environment will remain unsettled and the defense establishments of both sides will continue to hinder positive relations while viewing their opposite number with wariness and distrust. Each of the below recommended programs incorporate these elements of depth, breadth and duration. While these individual programs all provide opportunities for small scale improvements in military-to-military relations, the synergistic effect of their simultaneous adoption and parallel application will achieve higher levels of mutual understanding than would be possible by any of these efforts alone.

## 1. Military Education Exchanges

Presently, the United States engages in multi-tiered educational exchanges with many of its historic allies, as well as several nations in the process of improving political, economic and military relations with the U.S. government. Ample precedents exist for direct application to the case of improving full-spectrum education cooperation with the PLA, including those programs shared with the Republic of China, the Kingdom of Thailand, as well as other Asian partners such as the Republics of India and South Korea. While many other successful international military education exchange programs exist, these few provide examples of various types of engagement strategies that proponents of improved military-to-military relation will necessarily follow. Among these are entry-level officer candidate experiential tours at counterpart military service academies, mid-grade postgraduate education at equivalent defense institutions and senior officer fellowships at appropriate defense and public policy think tanks. While each U.S. military service headquarters staff, and their opposite number in the PLA, PLA Navy and PLA Air Force, will delegate implementation of specific programs to appropriate internal departments, select exemplary personnel and evaluate project efforts for their desired outcomes, centralized administration and oversight must fall to the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense and the PRC Ministry of Defense. This high-level supervision and direction will allow executive authorities of both nations to provide strategic guidance in concert with current foreign policy objectives.

## 2. Partnership Operations Initiatives

Given existing tensions between the governments of the United States and the PRC, any effort to improve mutual understanding through cooperative engagement, must necessarily begin in a somewhat limited fashion. Ever present in the minds of American and Chinese policy-makers and citizens alike is the potential for conflict over divergent economic, political or social issues, including, but not limited to, the Taiwan Straits crisis, expansion of military capabilities, or definitions of domestic human rights. Popular sentiments in both nations require that military cooperation begin with training, exercises and operations which do not appear to improve the other's ability to project military power or provide greater advantage to one party at the expense of the other. While many within the Pentagon have attempted to conduct extensive military-to-military confidence

building liaisons, exercises and operations in the recent past, the Department of Defense has been hindered in its efforts to build a strong strategic partnership with the PLA by pressure from the U.S. Congress. Similarly, the PRC government's policy of interrupting security collaboration in light of short-term crises, such as in the wake of the collision of a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane and a PLAAF fighter aircraft in 2001, limits the effectiveness of confidence building programs. Continuing legislative efforts in the United States and short-sighted foreign policy decisions within the Chinese government will ensure that future collaboration between the PLA and DoD have marginal impact on pan-Pacific relations.

Should these obstacles be removed, both the DoD and the PLA currently engage in a wide variety of appropriate combined operations and exercises with the military forces of other East and Southeast Asian nations that could readily be expanded into a systematic effort to improve relations between their respective nations. Included among these are combined air-sea rescue exercises, joint humanitarian assistance efforts, cooperative counter-narcotics operations and multinational repatriation of military remains endeavors. Combined air-sea rescue exercises have long been used as a means for military services to practice non-belligerent skill sets against a common problem of interest to all parties. These types of exercises allow for exchanges of ideas between military leaders, build communication pathways for use during future crises, demonstrate shared professionalism and reveal common bonds of service universal to each side. In fact, the United States and China have engaged in this type of joint effort in the past with modest levels of success.<sup>120</sup> By incorporating air-sea rescue exercises into a solid schedule of recurring events of a similar nature, both sides will begin to develop a sense of partnership that may carry on into other areas of military cooperation.

Joint humanitarian assistance efforts, such as the distribution of food aid to displaced populace in conflict zones, maintain the principle of low-intensity collaboration against international problems of mutual concern. By responding as a combined force to refugee crises or United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping operations, the United States and China send a strong message that peace, stability and the welfare of those that cannot defend themselves is more important than parochial national interests. Furthermore, joint

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<sup>120</sup> "PLA, US Military Join Hands in Rescue Exercise," *Xinhua News Agency*, 06 Dec 2000. Available from <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2000/Dec/4996.htm>. Internet; accessed 27 Nov 04.

humanitarian relief operations serve both sides' national interests by promoting socio-political stability and economic environments capable of sustained development. Examples of these types of operations include U.S. relief aid during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the recent PRC deployment of its People's Armed Police forces to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti.<sup>121</sup>

While inter-agency cooperation between U.S. and PRC law enforcement organizations has had significant success in investigating organized crime syndicates trafficking in illegal narcotics, this unprecedented collaboration, as reflected in the successful conclusion of Operation City Lights in 2003<sup>122</sup>, should become the norm and not the exception. Furthermore, by including the employment of military resources against this trans-national problem of mutual concern, both the United States and the PRC can more effectively interdict international smuggling operations and build trust between the services and agencies involved. Patterning these efforts after the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) in Key West, Florida, various U.S. civil and military agencies concerned with the reduction of the illegal narcotics trade could come together with their Asian counterparts in combined operations centers. These combined task forces can pool resources, leverage local expertise and apply unique skill sets, while exposing one another to innovative operating procedures and providing insight into each other's decision-making processes. Building trust and confidence through combined prosecution of long-standing trans-national problem sets offers the greatest opportunity for building stable, long-term relations between the defense establishments of both the American government and the leadership of the People's Republic of China.

A final example of potential partnership operations can be found in combining the existing efforts of both the PRC and U.S. governments to repatriate the remains of their war dead that were never accounted for during the various belligerent expeditions undertaken by both nations during the past six decades. By acknowledging joint responsibility for gaining closure with regard to unresolved Prisoner of War and Missing

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<sup>121</sup> Edward Cody, "China Readies Riot Force for Peacekeeping in Haiti," *Washington Post*, 29 September 2004. Available from <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/haiti/2004/0929chinafirst.htm> Internet; accessed 12 Mar 2005.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, "Massive Heroin-Smuggling Organization Dismantled: Historic Cooperation Between U.S. and China," *DEA News Release*, 16 May 2003. Available from <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/nyc051603.html>. Internet; accessed 28 Nov 2004.

in Action (POW/MIA) cases from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War, senior government officials, military members and common citizens from both countries gain respect for one another. These tangible efforts will progress the mass psycho-social healing process of former adversary polities and allow both sides to put old differences behind them and focus on future opportunities for peaceful interaction.

### 3. Systematic Senior Summits

A necessary part of any effort to improve understanding of the methods and motivations of decision-makers in opposing camps is the face-to-face exchange of senior officials through a program of systematic and recurring discussions of topics of mutual interest. However, when the governments of the PRC and the United States limit this type of exchange to only the very highest levels of military or civilian government leadership, innocuous visits take on extremely political ramifications and no substantive discussions can take place due to extreme sensitivities to national agendas. By increasing the frequency and stabilizing the schedule of these visits, as well as reducing the rank of attendees, the sense of regularity and reduced threat level of the exchanges can establish working relationships at the regional component deputy commander (two-star flag officer) and deputy assistant secretary echelons. These relationships can yield significant returns in the reduction of mistrust between senior leaders and the formation of mutually beneficial regional security policies.

Each of the preceding recommendations were designed to serve the national interests of both the United States and the PRC, either through direct benefits of improving non-combat operating procedures and opening official channels of communication or indirectly through confidence building and improving mutual trust. It is this latter area that deserves the greatest attention as it has been the most neglected during the preceding decades of sporadic contact between the military services of these two great nations. Without stable, long-term military-to-military relations, the present state of tense tolerance and dubious distrust will continue for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, this is the most likely outcome if the two nations each remain determined to proceed only along lines of strict reciprocity. By demanding quid pro quo with regard to individual port calls and site visits, reciprocal release of internal protocols and access



to confidential communications, neither nation will develop the trust nor confidence in its opposite number that is necessary to avoid misunderstandings and missteps that could lead to confusion and conflict in the very near future.

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